

A BRAVE LADY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN."

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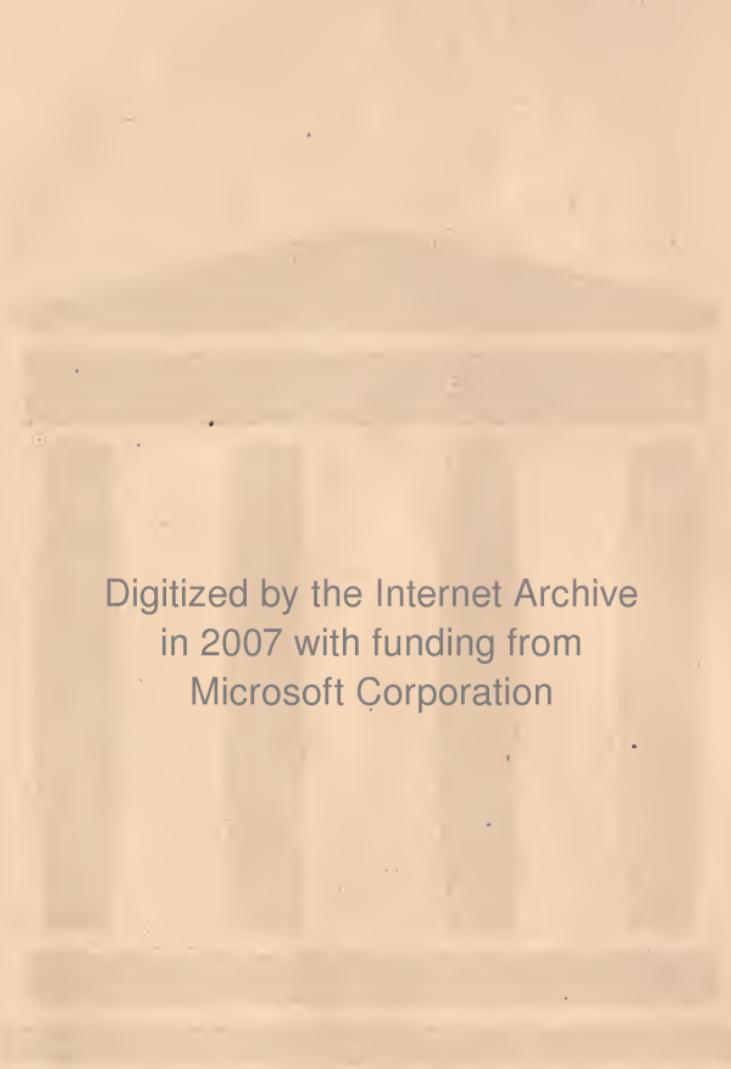


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A BRAVE LADY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,” “A LIFE FOR A LIFE,” “OLIVE,”
“THE OGILVIES,” “A NOBLE LIFE,” &c.

Mrs. Craik

With Illustrations.

“Perhaps it may turn out a sang,
Perhaps turn out a sermon.”—BURNS.



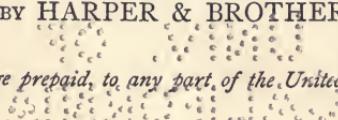
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A BRAVE LADY.

THE PROLOGUE.

IN most, nay, I think in all lives, is some epoch which, looking back upon, we can perceive has been the turning-point of our existence—a moment when the imagination first wakes up, the feelings deepen, and vague, general impressions settle into principles and convictions; when, in short, our bias for good or ill is permanently given. We may not recognize this at the time, but we do afterward, saying to ourselves, either with thankfulness or regret, “But for such and such a thing, or such and such a person, I should not have been what I am.”

This crisis befell me, Winifred Weston, when I was just entering my sixteenth year. It was not “falling in love,” as in most cases it is—and rightly, for love is, or ought to be, the strongest thing on earth; but it was equivalent to it, and upon me and the moulding of my character it had precisely the same effect. Nay, in a sense I did really fall in love, but it was a very harmless phase of the passion; for I was a commonplace damsel of sixteen, and the object of my intense admiration—nay, my adoring affection—was an old lady of seventy.

A young girl in love with an old woman! What a ridiculous form of the emotion, or sentiment! Not so ridiculous, my good friends, as at first appears; and by no means so uncommon as you suppose. I have known several cases of it besides my own: cases in which a great difference in years and character drew out, to a remarkable degree, that ideal worship and passionate devotedness which is at the root of all true love, first love especially. Laugh as you will, there is always a spice of nobleness in the boy who falls in love with his “grandmother;” and I have often thought that one of the extenuating circumstances in the life of that selfish, pleasure-loving, modern heathen, Goethe, was the fact that in his old age he was so adored by a “child.”

Nor does the character of the feeling alter when it is only a woman’s toward a woman. I have loved a man, thank God, having found a man worth loving; but he well knows that for a long time he ranked second in my affections to a woman—to this woman, for whom my attachment had all the intensity of love itself.

She was, as I have said, quite old, even at the time when I first beheld her, which happened to be at church. Our pews were along-

side of one another, for I sat in the rector’s, and she in the one beyond. I was the new curate’s daughter, and she was “the lady of the hall”—Brierley Hall, the oldest and finest place in the neighborhood. She entered alone. Many of the fine families of the parish always had a footman to carry their prayer-books, but she carried her own; walked alone, stately and slow, up the aisle, and took her seat in a corner of the large musty pew, the cushions and linings of which, once a rich crimson cloth, had faded with the sunshine of indefinite summers. They contrasted strongly with the black of her garments—black, but not sombre; her gown being of rich glittering silk, though she still wore a sort of widow’s cap over her smooth, soft, white hair.

I knew who she was. Though my father and I had only been a week at Brierley, she was of sufficient importance there for us to have already heard about her—at least as much as the village generally knew. I had been told I should be sure to see her in church, the only place where she ever was seen in public; and she had been described to me so minutely that my excited curiosity could not fail to recognize her at once.

Even had it been otherwise, I think the result would have been all the same. It was to be, and it was; and I could not help it. I, the poor curate’s daughter, motherless, romantic, solitary, brought up in the strictest seclusion, fell in love, desperately and determinedly, with this beautiful old lady—Lady de Bougainville.

It was such a remarkable name too, and so exactly suited to her appearance. Let me describe her if I can.

She had “high” features, as they are called—that is, her nose was aquiline, and the outline of her cheek and chin sharply and clearly cut; likewise her mouth, which, though delicate, had much decision in it. It was a sad and firm rather than a sweet mouth; or perhaps it seemed as if it had been meant to be sweet, but the experience of life had hardened it. Nevertheless, the old softness could and did at times return; I saw it afterward, not then. Sadness also was the characteristic of her eyes—sadness, or at any rate pensiveness. They put me in mind of the sea after a storm, when the waves have calmed down, and the surface has grown smooth, or even broken out again into little necessary ripples: but you

know all the while there must be, somewhere or other, many a broken spar floating about; many a castaway treasure beaten against the beach; many a dead carcass of ancient grief rising up from the depths below. Such did rise—and I fancied I could see them—in the dark eyes of this my beautiful lady—the most beautiful, I still think, that I ever beheld, though she was a septuagenarian.

Even now, as I vainly try to describe her, I feel my old infatuation return—the delight with which I watched every curve of her features—pale, colorless features—as un-English and peculiar as her eyes; and admired every fold in her dress—quite unlike any lady's dress I had ever seen. Her toilet was complete in all its details, as beffited both herself and her station. She was *chaussée et gantée* (the French best expresses what I mean; we English merely *put on* gloves and shoes) to perfection; and she had little hands and little feet—remarkably so for such a tall woman. She lost no inch of her height, and she carried her head like one who has never lowered it in shame or sycophancy before mortal man. "Aristocratic" undoubtedly would have been the adjective applied to her; but used in its right sense, as belonging to "the best" of the earth. There was nothing haughty about her, or repellent, or scornful—if these qualities are supposed to constitute aristocracy.

Her eyes and complexion, as I have said, were very un-English, and when she began to say the responses, it was with a slight, a very slight accent—French, I thought; but in nothing else was she foreign. Her dress was the ordinary dress of an English widow, from whose weeds Time has melted away the obnoxious pomposity of crape, and allowed a faint mixture of white and gray with the black. But it was black still—no bugles—no trimmings—no ornamental fripperies, which always seem such a mockery of mourning. Her costume was perfectly plain, perfectly simple, yet exceedingly rich; as was justifiable in a lady whose wealth was, people said, very great, and who had not a creature to inherit it after her.

For Lady de Bougainville was that sad sight, a widowed wife—a mother left childless. In her solitary old age she kept her forlorn state in that huge house, which, many years ago, her husband, Sir Edward de Bougainville, had bought, rebuilt, lived in for a short time, and then died. Before then, by a succession of fatalities, her six children had died also. Thenceforward she, too, was as good as dead, socially speaking, to the little world of Brierley. She did not quit the Hall. She kept it up externally much as before—that is, none of the rooms were closed, and there was a sufficient establishment of servants. But she lived in it quite alone—never visited any where, nor invited any body to visit her. So she passed her days, and had passed them—our gossiping landlady told me—for twenty years and more, the wonder and curiosity of the neighborhood—

this poor, lonely, wealthy woman—the envied, pitied, much revered, much criticised Lady de Bougainville.

Those who revered her were the poor, to whom she was unlimitedly charitable: those who criticised her were the rich, the county families with whom she had long ceased to associate, and the new-comers whom she never sought to visit at all. These were naturally indignant that Brierley Hall should be shut up from them—that no dinner-parties should be given in the fine old dining-room where Charles II. was said to have taken a royal refection after hunting in the chase which surrounded the property. The younger generation likewise felt aggrieved that on such a beautiful lawn there should be no archery parties (croquet then was not), and no hope whatever of a ball in the tapestry-chamber, concerning which there were rumors without end; for none of the present generation had ever seen it.

Once things had been very different. While Sir Edward was rebuilding the Hall he inhabited a house near, and lived in a style suitable to his fortune, while his wife and family mingled in all the best society of the neighborhood. They were exceedingly popular, being a large merry family—handsome to look at, full of life and strength. Their father was less liked, being "rather queer," people said, somewhat unsocial, and always fancying himself a great invalid. But their mother shared in all their youthful enjoyments, and herself shone upon society like a star.—Vanished too, almost as suddenly; for after a certain grand ball—a house-warming which Sir Edward gave—and the splendors of which the elder generation in the village remembered still, the master of Brierley Hall fell really ill of some mysterious ailment. "Something amiss here, folk said," observed my informant, tapping her forehead; and after lingering, unseen by any body, for many months, died, and was buried in Brierley church-yard. His monument, in plain white marble, without any of the fulsomeness common to epitaphs, was over his widow's head every Sunday as she sat in the Hall pew.

There, too, was a second tablet, equally simple in form and inscription, recording the names, ages, and dates of death of her six children. They had every one perished, some abroad, some at home, within a comparatively short space of time—dying off, as some families do die off, when all the probabilities seem in favor of their continuing to remote generations a prosperous, healthy, and honorable race. When I read the list of names on the white tablet, and glanced thence at the mother's face, I no longer wondered at its sad expression, or at those "peculiarities"—people called them—which had made her the talk of the village, until it grew weary of talking, and let her alone.

At first, in the early years of her desolation, her neighbors had made many attempts, some from curiosity, some from pure kindness, to break through her determined seclusion; but

they failed. She was neither uncourteous nor ungrateful, but there was about her a silent repelling of all sympathy, which frightened the curious and wore out the patience of even the kindest-hearted of these intruders. She let them see, plainly enough, that their visits were an intrusion, and that it was her intention to reappear in society no more.

She never did. Except at church on Sundays, or driving out along the most unfrequent roads, in her handsome old-fashioned carriage, no one saw her beyond the limits of her own grounds. She was as little known as the Dalai Lama, and regarded with almost equal awe. Her smallest deeds were noticed, her lightest saying recorded, and her very name uttered respectfully, as if she were a different person to the rest of the world.

She was. As I sat gazing at her during the whole of church-time, I felt that I never had seen, never should see, any body like Lady de Bougainville.

It so happened that hitherto I had known very few women—that is, gentlewomen—partly because in the far-away parish where we had lived till we came here, there were only farm-houses, except the great house, which my father never let me enter. A certain sad prejudice he had—which I will no further allude to except to say that, though I was motherless, my mother was not dead—made him altogether avoid female society. He had brought me up entirely himself, and more like a boy than a girl: in my heart I wished I was a boy, and rather despised my own sex, until I saw Lady de Bougainville.

She, with her noble beauty, not weak, but strong; with her unmistakable motherly air, not the feeble fondness which is little better than an animal instinct, but that large protecting tenderness which makes one ready to defend as well as cherish one's offspring: she seemed to me a real woman—a real mother. And all her children were dead!

I did not presume to pity her, but my heart was drawn toward her by something deeper than the fascination of the eye. The fancy of sixteen can take a pretty long Queen Mab's gallop in two hours: by the time service was over I seemed to have been "in love" with her for years.

She walked down the aisle a little before rather than after the rest of the congregation, quitting the church among not the genteel but the poor people, who courtesied to her and were acknowledged by her as she passed, but she made and received no other recognition. Alone as she came she departed, and alone she ascended her carriage—one of those chariots swaying about on springs, such as were in fashion thirty years ago, with hammer-cloth in front and dickey behind. Her footman handed her in, and shut the door upon her with a sharp click, and an air as solemnly indifferent as that of the undertaker who closes a coffin-lid upon some highly respectable corpse whose friends have

quitted the house—as I hear in fashionable houses they always do; and her coachman then drove her off, the sole occupant of this handsome carriage, as slowly as if he were driving a hearse.

After all there was something pathetically funeral in this state, and I should have hated it, and turned away from it, had I not been so fascinated by Lady de Bougainville herself. She burst upon my dull life—craving for anything new—as an interest so vivid that it was an actual revelation. I went home, to think about her all day, to dream of her at night; I drew her profile—how perfect it was, even though it was an old woman's face!—among the sums on my slate, and along the margins of my Latin exercise-book. I kept my mind always on the *qui vive*, and my ears painfully open, to catch any floating information concerning her; but I was as shy of putting direct questions about her as if I had been a young man and she my first love. Do not laugh at me, you who read this; it is such a good thing to be "in love" with any body. When we grow older we love in a quieter and more rational way; but even then we regard tenderly our idolatries.

It seemed a long week till the next Sunday, and then I saw her again. Henceforward, from Sunday to Sunday, I lived in a suppressed suspense and longing—sure to be satisfied then; for, fair weather or foul, Lady de Bougainville was always in her place at church. Only upon Sundays was my fancy "with gazing fed;" but it fattened so rapidly upon that *maigre* diet that I went through all the preliminary stages of a real love-fever. Most girls have it, or something like it, and it rather does good than harm, especially if the object is, as in my case, only a woman. Poor little lamb that she was—silly Winny Weston! I look back at her now as if she were some other person, and not myself; seeing all her faults, and all her good points, too; and I beg it to be distinctly understood that I am not the least ashamed of her, or of her "first love," either.

That my idol should ever cast a thought toward me was an idea that never entered even my vivid imagination. She cast a glance occasionally—that is, she looked over my head to the opposite wall, but I never supposed she saw me. However, this was of no consequence so long as I could see her, and speculate upon her, weaving long histories of which she was the heroine; histories over which I afterward smiled to think how far they were from the truth. Then, having exhausted the past, I turned to the future, and amused myself with conjuring up endless probabilities and fortuitous circumstances which might cause Lady de Bougainville and myself to meet, or enable me to do some heroic action for her, with or without her knowledge—it did not matter much. Sometimes I pictured her horses starting off, and myself, little Winny Weston, catching hold of their bridles and preventing a serious accident;

or some night there might arise a sudden gleam of fire among the trees whence peeped the chimneys of Brierley Hall, which I often watched from my bedroom window in the moonlight; and I pictured myself giving the alarm, and rushing to the spot just in time to save the house and rescue its aged mistress. Perhaps, after some such episode, she would just notice my existence, or, if I did any thing very grand, would hold out her hand and say—in the same clear voice which every Sunday besought mercy upon “us miserable sinners,” as if she could be a miserable sinner!—“Thank you, Winifred Weston.” Suppose I actually saved her life—who knows? she might do even more—open her arms to my motherless but yearning heart, and whisper, “Winifred, be henceforth my child!”

All this was very silly and very melodramatic; yet it was better for me than many of the follies that one's teens are heir to—better than dancing and flirting into womanhood, buoyed up by the frothy admiration of raw young-manhood. It taught me to love, rather than to crave for being loved: and it taught me—if only through my imagination—two other things which I think the present generation rather loses sight of—heroism and patience.

That Lady de Bougainville herself was capable of both I felt sure, from her very face. The better I knew it the more it fascinated me. It was an ideal face—nay, there was something in it absolutely historical, like one of those old portraits which you are convinced have a story belonging to them; or to which you may affix any story you please. Calm as it was, it was neither a stony nor impassive face. Often, when something in my father's sermon attracted her—he preached very good and original sermons sometimes—she would brighten up, and fix upon him her dark eyes—keen and clear as if they were twenty-five years old instead of seventy. But ordinarily she sat with them cast down; not in laziness, or pride, or scorn, but as if they were tired—tired of looking out upon the world for so many years. When lifted they had often a wistful and abstracted expression, as if she were living in times and places far away. As she said to me, months after, when I ventured to ask her what she did with herself—that is, when her daily work was done—“My dear, I dream. I have nothing to do but to dream.”

What first put it into her mind to notice me I have even now not the slightest idea. I suppose it was nothing but the impulse of her own kind heart: when, missing me from my seat at church, she inquired about me, and who I was: finally, hearing I was ill—of that most unpoetical complaint, the measles—she did as she was in the habit of doing to almost every sick person in the village, sent daily to inquire and to offer gifts. Only these gifts came at first rather from the gardens and vineeries than the kitchen of Brierley Hall; until, some little bird having perhaps whispered to her that a poor curate often feeds not quite so well as a prosperous artisan, there appeared gradually jellies, soups,

and other nourishing aliments. When I learned from whence they came, I banqueted upon them as if they were the ambrosia of the earth.

But they did not cure me; and I had been fully five weeks absent from church when one Monday morning—oh, that blessed Monday!—there came a little note to my father—a note on delicate-colored paper, with a small black seal, in a handwriting diminutive, upright, firm—more like foreign than English caligraphy. I have it still:

“Lady de Bougainville presents her compliments to the Rev. Henry Weston, and would esteem it a pleasure if he would trust his daughter to her for a week's visit. Brierley Hall was always considered a healthy place, and Lady de Bougainville has seen many sad instances of long ill-health, which a slight change of air at first might have cured. She will take the utmost care of the child”—[here “the child” was crossed out, and “Miss Weston” inserted]—“if Mr. Weston will consent to part with her. A carriage shall fetch her at any hour to-day or to-morrow, so as to avoid all fatigue.”

Most wonderful! The letter dropped from my trembling hands. Aladdin, Fortunatus, Cinderella—all those lucky youths and maiden, befriended by fairies and good genii—were not more intoxicatingly happy than I.

“Father, you will let me go!” I cried. “Not to-day, perhaps” (for—it was a natural weakness—I suddenly remembered the state of my wardrobe; a condition not surprising in a poor curate's motherless daughter); “but to-morrow? You will send back word that I shall be ready by—let me see—by noon to-morrow?”

I always had every thing pretty much my own way; so it was soon arranged that I should pay this—the first visit I had ever paid from home alone.

Young people who have many friends, and are always interchanging visits, can have no idea of the state of excitement I was in. It seemed to rouse me out of invalidism at once. To go any where—to any body, would have been charming; but to Brierley Hall! it was ecstasy! To live under the same roof as my beautiful old lady—to see her every day in ordinary life—to be kindly noticed by her—to be able to render her various small services, such as a young person can so easily pay to an elder one: the cup of my felicity was full. It was worth being ill—twenty times over. I thought—I think still, and, while laughing at myself, it is with tears in my eyes—that the measles was a special interposition of Providence. Not in any worldly point of view. In spite of all my landlady's respectful and mysterious congratulations, I could see no special advantage likely to accrue to me from the visit; but I accepted it as a present delight; about which, and my own deserving of it, I did not speculate at all. In fact, I took going to the Hall as naturally as I suppose I shall one day take going to heaven; and it felt not unlike it.

My clothes were at first a serious weight on my mind; they were so few, so poor, and—as, alas! I only now seemed to discover—so untidy. When I thought of Lady de Bougainville, her silks, velvets, and furs, the richness

of which was almost forgotten in their exquisite neatness and appropriateness, my heart failed me. Well, she was rich and I was poor; but still that need not make such a vital difference. Even poor folk can contrive to keep their garments clean and whole. I must try to turn over a new leaf from this day forward.

So I mended and arranged, folded and packed, wishing faintly that I could put some womanly orderliness into my too boyish ways; and this practical occupation kept my head steadily balanced, and leveled a little the heights and depths of excitement, the alternations of eager expectation and shyness almost amounting to fear, which came upon me. Yet the whole of the day I was in a fever of delight. I tried to hide it, lest my father should think I was glad to leave him, this first time in my life that I ever had left him. But it was not that at all; it was no carelessness to old ties, only the dawning instinct for new ones—the same instinct which prompts the young bird to creep to the edge of even the warmest and safest nest, and peer over into the unknown world beyond. It may be a cold world—a dangerous, fatal world, wherein, many a day yet, we may wander about shivering, and long regretfully for the nest left behind. But for all that we can not stay in the nest: God gives us wings, and when they grow we must use them; whatever it costs us, we must learn to fly.

Nevertheless, when I had bidden my father good-by—as solemn a good-by as if I had been bound to the Antipodes—and sat alone in the Hall carriage, my heart failed me a little. Luxury was so new to me; I was half frightened by it. Yet was I not well-born? Had not my forefathers driven about in carriages quite as grand as this one? Besides, in my still feeble health, the easy equipage, rolling lazily and smoothly along, gave me rather a pleasurable sensation. After the first minute or two I began to believe in the reality of my felicity; and Aladdin as he rubbed his lamp, Cinderella as she leaned back in her pumpkin chariot, were not more full of happy hope than I.

As we drove through the village, and people stared at the Hall equipage passing at an unwonted hour, I first sat bolt upright in it, with a conscious pleasure that every body should see me there; then I scorned myself for the mean vanity. It was better to hide my happiness in the deep of my heart, and the darkest corner of the carriage: so I leaned back, saying to myself in proud delight, “Nobody knows—nobody knows.” For it seemed to me that the whole world, if they did know it, would envy me, thus going on a visit to Lady de Bougainville.

We reached the lodge-gates. I had often peeped through them at the mysterious region beyond, where the fine red-brick mansion glimmered through the green of the long elm-avenue; and the trees which dotted the park cast their shadows on the smooth turf—making a picture which sometimes reminded me of the garden of the Hesperides.

Now, however, the gates flew open, and a very commonplace gardener's wife admitted us into the enchanted ground. It was such—it always will be such to me. As the carriage rolled slowly between those two lines of patriarchal elms, just dressing themselves anew in the soft green of early spring, I felt that the modern villas starting up around us so fatally fast, snug and smug, four-square, Portland-cemented, with newly-painted palisades, and araucarias and deodaras stuck here and there in the fresh-made lawn, were no more to compare with Brierley Hall than were their occupants, fat and well-to-do gentlemen, highly-dressed and highly-respectable ladies, with *my* Lady de Bougainville.

Could that be herself standing at the door? No, of course not; how could I have imagined such a condescension?

Nevertheless, it was a friendly-smiling and pleasant person—a lady's maid, but not the elderly Abigail one might have expected. Curiously enough, the domestics at Brierley Hall were, except one, all young servants.

“My lady says, Miss, that I am to take you straight to your bedroom, and see that you lie down and rest there till dinner-time—six o'clock. You shall have a cup of tea directly.”

I often fancy people know not half the mysteries of personal influence; and how curiously they themselves are reflected in their servants. This young woman—who was as civil as if I had been the Honorable Winifred Weston, come on a visit with my own maid and a heap of luggage—took from me my small portmanteau, led the way across a wide hall, of which in my bewildered nervousness I only saw a glimmer of painted glass, green marble pillars, and polished oaken floors, up a beautiful staircase, and into a warm, fire-lit bedroom.

We all have our ideals, and this will be my ideal bedchamber to the end of my days. It was not large, at least not too large to feel cozy; and it was made still smaller by a subdivision: an arch, supported on Corinthian pillars, behind which was the bed and all the toilet apparatus, making a clear distinction between the sleeping and the social half of the room. In the latter, collected snugly round the hearth, were a sofa, a table, writing materials, books; a little encampment, on which the fire blazed welcomely this chilly, gray, spring day. Above it, inserted into the wainscoted wall, was a curious oil-painting, half length, life-sized, of some old saint. From the unkempt hair and beard, the leather girdle, and the robe of camel's hair, I concluded it was John the Baptist. A strange fancy to have him there, gazing with wan face, and gleaming, reproachful eyes that seemed ever crying “Repent ye,” upon the luxuries of the room.

It appeared luxurious to me, for I had never beheld one any thing equal to it. I was half amused, half annoyed, to see how many necessities of civilized life I had hitherto done without; toilet appliances of mysterious kind; end-

less drawers, closets, and shelves in which to stow away my poor property; mirrors and hand-glasses, reflecting every where my humble person, gaunt with the awkwardness of my age, ill-dressed, unlovely. Then the bed, which was of foreign make, with a graceful canopy, rich 'damask hangings, and a counterpane of quilted silk. How could I ever go to sleep in it?

At first, I own, my novel position quite frightened me. But when I had drank my tea, unpacked myself—declining assistance through sheer shame—and arranged my garments as carefully and as widely as I could upon their numerous receptacles, after having taxed my mother-wit to the utmost in discovering the uses of all these things, so as not to be disgraced in the eyes of house-maid or lady's-maid, then I took heart of grace. I said to myself, "Winy Weston, you are a fool. All these things are mere externalities. They could not make you a lady, if you were not one; and, if you are, the lack of them will not unmake you. Pluck up your courage, and do the best you can."

So I curled myself up comfortably on the sofa, and lay gazing at the delicious fire. Ah, that luxury, the permanent bedroom fire! I had never been allowed it yet; it never would have occurred to me to have it, except in case of illness; but here it was apparently the custom of the house, and any one of a solitary, shy nature can best appreciate the intense comfort, the delicious peace, of being able to shut one's door upon all the world, and warm one's soul and body thoroughly at one's own particular bedroom fire.

Lady de Bougainville had done a kind thing in leaving me to myself until dinner-time. But to "lie down and rest," according to her orders, which the maid had given with an air as if nobody ever was expected to gainsay any thing the mistress said—was impossible; rest is for a later period of life than mine. In an hour I had exhausted all the delights of fireside meditation, all the interest of my room, including the views from my two windows, and was dying with curiosity to penetrate further.

I opened the door and peeped out, as timidly as a young mouse on her travels. All was silent, as silent as Tennyson's Sleeping Palace. Why should I not creep down stairs, just to examine the staircase and hall?

I delight in a fine wide staircase; it is the lungs of a house. I am sure people who plan grand reception-rooms with narrow ascents thereto, must have rather narrow minds. The planner of this had not. As I looked over the balustrade of carved oak—carved as beautifully as Grinling Gibbons could have done it—and then upward to the circular ceiling, over which flying Cupids were hanging wreaths, and downward to the broad, polished stairs, winding step after step in smooth dignified progression—I thought of the lovely ladies passing up and down it with their sweeping trains—their high head-dresses, like that in my great-grandmo-

ther's portrait—escorted by gentlemen—such gentlemen as was Sir Charles Grandison. And I thought then—I fear I think now—that these were far finer specimens of humanity, inside and outside, than the young men and women whom I shall meet at the next dinner-party I go to, or have to see flirting with my sons and daughters—when old enough—at the next ball.

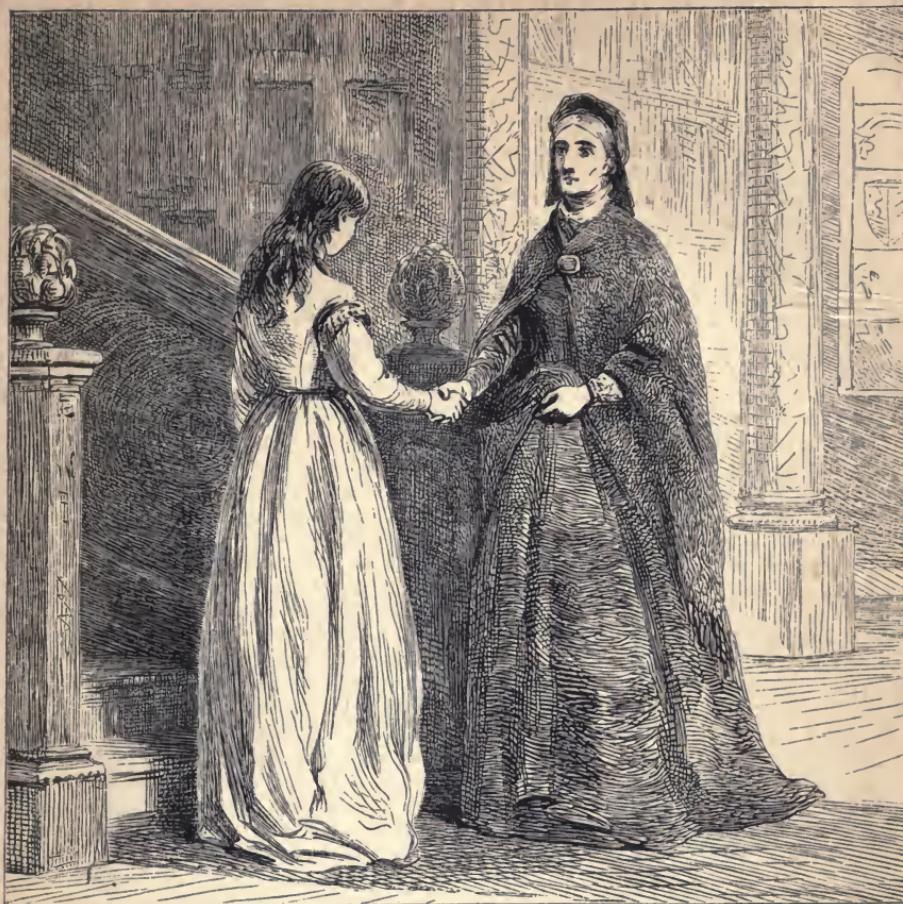
Descending, I gazed left and right across the hall, which ran right through the centre of the house from door to door. Great windows lit it at either end, large panes of stained glass, forming shapes not unlike crosses—one scarlet and blue, the sacred colors, such as old painters always gave to their Madonnas—the other violet and green. Supporting the hall in the middle were double pillars of scagliola marble; its walls were of some soft gray papering, with Pompeian figures grouped here and there; and across the wide space of its dark oak floor ran rivers of carpeting, cutting it up a little, but just enough to make it safe. Only French feet can glide across those slippery plains of polished wood, beautiful as they are. Mine failed me more than once; and in the perfect silence and solitude I felt—not altogether comfortable, yet deliciously, ecstatically happy.

There is a belief among modern psychologists—one of whom has lately developed it in a novel—that we are none of us wholly individual or original beings, but made up of our countless antecedents—of whose natures, combined or conflicting, we partake, and often feel them struggling within us. As if we were not ourselves at all, but somebody else—some far-back progenitor whose soul was new-born into our infant body, to work us weal or woe, and influence us more or less throughout life—a creed not more impossible or ridiculous than many other scientific theories.

As I stood for the first time in this house, gradually it seemed to become familiar and natural. Large and fine as it was, it was a *house*, not a baronial residence. In it I felt myself a mere drop of water, but it was water conscious of rising to its level. The soul of my great-grandmother seemed to enter into me; and I thought in my silly, childish heart, that if I only had a train I could sweep up the beautiful staircase with as grand an air as she. Ay, and enjoy it too. So absorbed was I in my foolish dream that I drew myself up to my full height, and shook out my scanty cotton frock, trying to imagine myself one of those ladies, like what my great-grandmother must have been—my beautiful great-grandmother, whose miniature, with the rose in her hair, I knew so well.

At that luckless moment I heard an outer door open—and in walked Lady de Bougainville.

I knew it was she, though she looked, of course, in her home dress and garden wraps, different from what she looked in church. But she was one of those people who seem to make their costume instead of their costume making them. Whatever she had on, she was sure to be the same.



WINIFRED WESTON AND LADY DE BOUGAINVILLE.

I half hoped her eye would not discover me, but I was mistaken. She came forward at once.

"Is that you, my little visitor?" and she put out her hand—her old soft hand, the softest, I think, I ever felt, though it was withered and thin, so that the jeweled rings hung loosely on every finger—"I thought you were safe resting in your room. What have you been doing? Where were you going?"

Sweet as her voice was—sweet as when uttering the responses in church—there was in it the tone of the mistress and mother, accustomed all her life to be answered and obeyed.

I answered at once—though in a hot agony of confusion, which makes me even now pity myself to remember—"I was not going anywhere, my lady."

She smiled. "Don't say 'my lady'; the servants only do that. If you call me 'ma'am'—as I was taught to say to my elders when I was a girl—it will do quite well."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And what shall I call you? Miss Weston, or simply Winifred?"

"Winifred, please, ma'am—nothing but Winifred?" cried I, my delight suddenly making me

bold. Then I shrank back into myself with a wild collapse of shame.

She took no notice of it, except just to pat me on the shoulder, saying, "Very well, Winifred;" and then began asking a courteous question or two about my father. So my heart, which had at first beat in my bosom like a little steam-engine, slowly quieted itself down, and I recovered sufficiently to be able to look up in my hostess's face, to hear and answer intelligently, and even to take in the minutiae of her dress and appearance.

What a picture of an old lady she was! If all old ladies did but know the wisdom of recognizing the time when a woman should cease following fashion's changes, except in a very modified form, and institute, so far as she can, a permanent costume! Lady de Bougainville's was charming. Not exactly old-fashioned; neither of this year, nor that year, nor the year before, but suited to all years, and looking well at all seasons. It was excessively simple, consisting only of a black silk gown, without trimmings of any sort, but the material was so rich and good that none were required. It fitted her figure—which was slender and straight,

even at seventy years of age; and she was so upright that walking behind her you might have taken her for a woman of thirty. At throat and wrists she had a sort of frill, made of fine cambric and Valenciennes lace. Over her widow's cap was drawn a garden-hood or *capuchon*, such as Frenchwomen wear. A French shawl, of fine soft black merino, fell round her in comfortable folds. Indeed, there was something about her toilet essentially French. We had happened to live three months in that country—my father and I—just before we came to Brierley, so I was able to detect this fact; and also a small *souçon* of an accent which developed itself more the more she spoke, and gave her speech, as a slight foreign accent always gives to otherwise correct English, a certain pretty individuality.

As she stood before me, and talked to me, in her ordinary home dress, and upon ordinary subjects, but looking none the less stately and beautiful than she had done in church for Sunday after Sunday, I felt as bewildered and entranced as would a poor little nun who suddenly sees the Virgin Mary or St. Catherine step down from her niche and become everyday womanhood.

When I had grown a little less afraid of her, and had succeeded in answering all her questions—very harmless, commonplace questions, about my father's health and my own, but given with a kind of tender graciousness, and an earnestness over the replies, which great people do not always show to little people—she put to me a second inquiry, or rather a repetition of the first, which frightened me as much as ever.

For I felt it must be answered, and truly, even if untruth had occurred to me as one way of getting out of the difficulty—which it did not. Lying usually springs from cowardice; and, girl as I was, I had never yet been afraid of any mortal soul. So when Lady de Bougainville asked, with a covert smile, what I was doing when she caught sight of me, I confessed, silly as I knew the confession must make me appear:

"I was trying to walk up stairs as if I had a train. I wanted to fancy myself my great-grandmother."

"And who was your great-grandmother?" asked she, laughing a little, but not in the way I had expected and feared.

"A very beautiful woman, I believe, and very rich."

"Ah!" drawing back at once, "I thought your family was poor?"

"So it is now, but it was not always." And I explained to her one or two traditions of the departed glory of the Westons, on which my imagination had always hung with great delight. To which she listened without comment, and apparently without being affected with them in any way; then asked:

"And your great-grandmother?"

"She was," I repeated, "a very beautiful woman; and she lived in a house which I sup-

pose must have been much like yours. I was wondering how she felt in it."

"Indeed. Then, Winifred, would you have liked to be your great-grandmother?"

I stopped to consider, for I could not bear to speak inaccurately, even at random. "For some things I should, ma'am; not for all."

"Why not for all?"

"I have heard she was not a very happy woman."

"Few women ever are very happy," said, with a slight sigh, which amazed me as much as her words, Lady de Bougainville.

Of course I did not presume to reply; and immediately afterward she changed the subject entirely, and began to speak to me about my own health, and the arrangements she had made for me in her house, with a view to my deriving as much benefit from the change as possible. Her questions, suggestions, and advices were all extremely practical and minute, even to the most motherly degree. I did not know what motherhood was then—the tie, both ways, from child to mother and from mother to child, was to me a perfect blank; but I had sense enough to have guessed instinctively, even had I not known the fact, that she who thus spoke to me had been the mother of many children; and that the heart once opened, in a way that only motherhood does open it, nothing afterward could altogether close. Her very eyes, as they rested upon me, had a pensive tenderness in them, as if beyond my face they saw another. Some women have that expression whenever they look at a child; it reminds them either of the dead or the lost—or, perhaps as sadly, of the never born.

I answered obediently my hostess's questions, though they surprised me a little. I mean, it was puzzling to find out that my idol was not too ideal to condescend to such ordinary things; in fact, was much more of a mortal woman than I expected. She appeared to me now not so much a medieval saint as a wise, sensible mother of a family, something like that most sensible and capable woman in the Proverbs, whose portrait, transmitted to us from distant ages, proves that the Hebrews at least had some notion of what a woman ought to be, and did not accept as their notion of feminine perfection a charming, amiable, beautiful—fool!

Looking closer at Lady de Bougainville, it was easy to detect under all her refinement an amount of strength which circumstances might drive into actual hardness; while against her high, pure, lofty nature might be laid the charge which inferior natures often do lay, that she could not understand them, and had no pity for them. Maybe so! In her clear, bright, honest eyes lurked the possibility of that cutting contempt for all things weak, and base, and double-faced which a mean person would find difficult to meet; and the delicate line of her lips could settle into a mouth firm enough to shame all cowards—a mouth like my pet heroine, Catherine Seyton's, when she put her

slender right arm as a bar through the bolts of the door, to protect those who needed her protection. Lady de Bougainville, I was sure, would have done the same any day.

I was not old enough fully to take in her character then, and I greatly fear that in many things I write about her now I am giving not so much my impressions of the time as my observations and convictions of a later period; but, child as I was, I could appreciate that force of nature which was able to deny as well as bestow, to blame as much as to praise.

She blamed me unequivocally for having disobeyed her orders and quitted my room, and would not listen for a moment to my excuses, which in their earnest honesty seemed to amuse as well as please her—that I was longing to go all over her beautiful house, the biggest and most beautiful I had ever seen in my life.

“Indeed. You must have been a quiet life, then, child. What sort of home did you live in?”

“In no home at all,” I said, mournfully, “only in furnished lodgings. And oh, if you did but know what it is to spend month after month, year after year, in furnished lodgings!”

She smiled. “Then you have never been any thing but poor, my dear? Is it so?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“That is right, that is honest. Poverty is no shame; the shame is for those who think it so, or fear to acknowledge it. Still it is a hard thing to bear sometimes.”

“Indeed I have found it so,” cried I, warmed up by this unexpected sympathy. “I don’t like it at all, but I bear it.”

Lady de Bougainville laid her hand, her delicate dear old hand, upon my head. “Poor little thing,” she murmured: “*pauvre petite*.” But the minute she had let fall the latter words she turned away from me. I did not know till long afterward that she had been in the habit of speaking French to her children.

Presently she addressed me with a sudden and quite uncalled-for asperity of tone.

“So you are poor, Winifred, and you would like to be rich. Do not deny it. I hate prevarication—I despise shams. Say outright, you foolish child, that you wish you were in my place, and lived at the Hall—perhaps even were mistress of it, as I am, and have been these many years. What a fortunate, happy woman I must be!”

There was a keen sarcasm in her voice which actually startled me; but immediately she became conscious that she was speaking in a way quite unsuitable for a child to hear, and quite incomprehensible to most children. Only I think that we who have spent our childhood either with grown people or quite alone, get a certain precocity of intuition, sharper and more accurate than is supposed. I should have been acute enough at guessing much concerning Lady de Bougainville had I not been frightened by her witch-like faculty of divining what was passing in my own mind. For I was painfully

conscious of having done exactly as she said, and broken the tenth commandment over and over again that morning.

“Do not blush so,” she went on. “You have done nothing very heinous, child, even if you have wished to step into my shoes, or to inherit my fortune and estate. I should consider such a fancy neither wicked nor unnatural at your age. Only if it really happened I should be very sorry for you.”

“Sorry!”

Her hand, firmer in its grasp than I could have thought possible to such soft fingers, was pressed on my shoulder; and her dark eyes, no longer wild, but piercing, penetrated down to the very depths of mine. “Now, child, pay attention to me for a minute, that we may begin our acquaintance on a sure footing. You are nothing to me, and I am nothing to you, except that I was sorry for you, as seventy is sorry for sixteen. But I see you are of a very imaginative temperament, as full of romantic notions as any girl of sixteen can be, and I know what that is—I was sixteen myself once. But I warn you, Winifred, build no castles in Spain at Brierley Hall. Do not fancy, because I invited you here to nurse you well again, and send you back home fit to battle with life, as is your lot, that I have taken a mysterious interest in you, and intend to adopt you, and make you my heiress.”

“Ma’am! Lady de Bougainville!”

She had been sitting on one of the hall chairs, and I on the staircase in front of her; but now I started up, and looked her full in the face. Child as I was, my indignation made me a woman for the moment—a woman, and her equal. I did not condescend even to rebut her accusation; I stood a minute, feeling myself grow hot and hotter, to the very roots of my hair, and then I darted away, and rushed violently up stairs.

“Winifred, child, where are you running to?”

“To fetch my bonnet. I am going home.”

But in the effort of speech I broke down, and before I reached my room door I had only strength to totter in and bury my head in the sofa cushions in a paroxysm of tears.

How long they lasted I do not know, but my first consciousness was a kind, cool hand on my head, and a soft voice calling me by my name. Lady de Bougainville was standing over me, looking grave and grieved, but not displeased at all. Nor amused, as many persons would have been, at this passion of almost ludicrous anger in a young girl, little more than a child. She held out her hand, smiling.

“I was mistaken, I see. Do not take it so seriously to heart. May not an old woman talk nonsense if she likes?”

“It was nonsense then? You did not really think I came here with such ideas in my head? You do not suppose me capable of such meanness? I don’t say,” continued I, for in all

my wrath I was still candid ; "I don't say that I should not like to be as rich as you—I should ; and I have thought so many a time this day. But I never wanted *your* riches. Keep them yourself ! For me, I despise them."

"So do I," she said, with an air of gentleness, even sadness, which to me was then wholly unaccountable.

She added no other word, but stood by me, firmly holding my hand, and looking down on me with a curious mixture of interest and compassion, until my sobs abated. But the result of the storm of indignation into which I had thrown myself was, as might be expected for one just recovering from severe illness, any thing but satisfactory. I fell into a sort of hysterical state, which soon made me quite incapable of going down stairs, or even of stirring from my sofa. My hostess tended me there, fetching no servant, but taking all the trouble of me upon herself for two or three hours—of which I remember little, except that she seemed to be quite another person than my preconceived idea of her. She soothed me, she scolded me, she made me take food and medicine; finally she put me to bed like a baby, and sat beside me, reading or pretending to read, till I fell asleep. I did not wake till broad daylight next morning.

It was a delicious waking—like dawn after a thunder-storm. My window faced the east, and the early sun looked in ; while, without, the birds sang their cheerful songs with the especial loudness that one hears on a spring morning. I felt tired, and not quite myself, but scarcely ill. In truth, I hated to be ill, or to be kept in bed one minute longer than necessary. So before any one could restrain me I had leaped out, and was already up and dressed when a knock came to my door. It was the maid, entering with my breakfast.

I was a little disappointed that it was only the maid, but I got a message, at all events.

"My lady wishes to know if you are better, Miss ? and, if you are, she will not disturb you till noon. She herself is always busy of a morning."

Was it out of consideration for me and my shyness, or had my tender, motherly nurse of the night before changed back into my idol of the church pew—my noble, stately, reserved, and unapproachable Lady de Bougainville ? I could not tell, but I accepted my lot, whatever it was. I implicitly obeyed her ; and, though the imprisonment was dreadful, I did not stir from my room until the cuckoo-clock on the chimney-piece—oh, how I love a cuckoo-clock !—had struck twelve. Then out I darted, to snatch, eager and happy, at the delights that lay before me.

Not quite happy though, for it struck me that I had made a goose of myself the previous evening ; but still this little episode, so uncomfortable and so unexpected, had had one good result—it had broken down the barrier between my idol and me, had taken away my

dread of her, and put a certain sympathy between us, in spite of the alarming difference of our years. How or why I did not know, not till long afterward ; but I felt it was so. Still, when once again I descended the stairs—not making such a little fool of myself as heretofore, but walking sagely and rationally, like a respectable young lady—and saw, as yesterday, that tall black figure entering in from the garden door, my heart beat a little with the old throb—half pleasure, half awe, but wholly love. I wonder if any man ever loved the sight of me as I did that of this lovely old woman !

She advanced with her smiling welcome, formal a little, but always smiling. I came afterward to know what a better welcome was, to have her arms round my neck, and her kiss on my cheek ; but I like to remember the earlier welcomes—just the simple hand-shake, and the kindly inquiry, written at once on lips and eyes. Some people say "How do you do?" and never wait to hear the answer, which you can omit altogether, if you choose—they will never miss it. But she always looked as if she liked to hear—as if she really was interested in learning how you were and what you were doing—as if the large sympathy which even seventy years had neither narrowed nor dulled took an interest in every minute thing you could tell her, and cared for your fortunes as if they had been her own.

After an inquiry or two, which she saw rather shamed and confused me, she ceased speaking of the little episode of last night, and took up the thread of our acquaintance precisely where we had left it yesterday.

"You were wanting to see my house ; shall I show it you now ? There will be quite time before luncheon."

"Will it not tire you too much ?" For I noticed that she looked extremely pale, and the dark circles under her eyes were deeper, as if she had been awake all night.

"Are you tired, Winifred ?"

"Oh no, thank you, ma'am."

"Then never mind me. When I was young I used to be told I was a Spartan," added she, smiling ; "and I try to be something of a Spartan still, in spite of my age. I could never endure to sink into the invalid or doting old woman. I hope I shall manage to die like that grand old philosopher who in his last moment started up from his arm-chair and said 'he would die standing.'"

She would, I thought, as I looked at her, so erect still, with her feet planted firmly, and her eyes flashing bright.

I said, with a concealed sense of my own erudition, that there was something very fine in dying, like Macbeth, "with harness on one's back."

Lady de Bougainville looked amused.

"You read Shakspeare, I see ?"

"Oh, I read everything."

"Everything is a large word. Now, I have read very little in my life. I am not at all an educated person."

I stared in utter amazement.

"It is quite true, my dear; or rather, for educated I should have said 'learned' or 'cultivated.' We get our education in many other ways besides reading books. But come, you will be more interested in my house than in me."

"Are you not very fond of your house, ma'am?"

"Perhaps I am. I like to have things suitable and beautiful about me. Pretty things were always good company to me: now they are the only company I have."

Then it was quite true that she received no one; that I was the sole guest who had been admitted into these precincts for years! I could hardly credit my own good fortune. And when I went with her, from room to room, talking familiarly, and hearing her talk—which was the greatest treat of all—I was almost bewildered with my happiness.

Her home seemed so completely a portion of herself, that in telling of her I can not help telling of it likewise, and should like to describe it minutely.

It was a house such as was used to be built by the landed gentry a century or two ago, just when the type of Elizabethan houses—political, but not too comfortable—was merging into that of modern convenience: convenience degenerating into luxury. It was not Gothic at all—had no queer corners—its general plan being four-square; the four reception-rooms making the outside angles, with the large central hall between. Some people might say it was not a picturesque house, but it was what I call an honest house; in which every thing feels real, substantial, and sound; well built, well ventilated; with high ceilings and airy passages, giving one breathing room and walking room; plenty of windows to see out of, and snug recesses to creep into; warm solid walls, and wide hospitable fire-places: in short, a house containing every requisite for a home and a family—a large, merry, happy household—contented in itself, and on good terms with the world outside. And in it Lady de Bougainville lived—all alone.

She took me from room to room, explaining the plan of the whole house, and showing me the ground-floor apartments; drawing-room, dining-room, morning-room, library. All were in perfect order: even the fires laid in the grates, ready to be kindled in a moment, to welcome a large family or a houseful of guests. And then we went slowly up the beautiful staircase, and she pointed out the exquisite oak carvings, the painted panels, and highly-decorated ceilings; telling me how they had been found covered up with plaster, whitewash, and other barbarisms of the last century; what pains she had taken to disinter them, and restore them to their original state. In describing, she regarded them with a curious tenderness—like one who has grown fond of inanimate objects—probably from having long had only inanimate objects to love.

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I ventured no questions: but I must have looked them, for once, turning suddenly to me, she said:

"I dare say you think this a large house for one old woman to live in—large and gloomy and empty. But it does not feel empty to me. When one has lived seventy years, one is sure to have, whether alone or not, plenty of companions; and it depends much upon one's self whether they are pleasant company or not. I am quite content with mine. No, I did not mean ghosts"—(seeing, doubtless, a shade of slight apprehension on my face, for, like all imaginative, solitary children, I had suffered horribly from supernatural fears). "I assure you, Winifred, my house is not haunted; I have no ghosts; at least, none that you will see. Besides, you are too much of a woman to have a child's sillinesses. How old did you say you were? I forgot."

I told her, sixteen.

"I was married the day I was sixteen."

Then for fifty-four years she must have been Lady de Bougainville. I longed to inquire further; to find out what her maiden name was, what her husband had been like, and how they fell in love with one another. They must have been such young lovers, for I had discovered, by arithmetical calculations from the date on his monument, that he was only about five years older than she. How I longed to hear it—this love-story of half a century ago; interesting and delicious as all love-stories are to girls of my age, eager to go the way their mothers and grandmothers went, only believing that with themselves the great drama of life would be played out in a far higher manner: as it never has been played before,

I craved for even a word or two concerning the past to fall from those lips—what sweet lips they must have been when, at only sixteen, they repeated the marriage vows!—but none did fall. The love-story never came. And, kind as she was, there was something about my hostess which at once excited and repressed curiosity. What she chose to reveal of her own accord was one thing; but to attempt to extract it from her was quite another. You felt that at the first daring question she would wither you with her cold rebuke, or in her calm and utterly impassive courtesy speak of something else, as if she had never heard you. The proof-armor of perfect politeness, as smooth and glittering as steel, and as invulnerable, was hers to a degree that I never saw in any other woman.

Though from the very beginning of our acquaintance, either from some instinctive sympathy, or from the natural tendency of old age to go back upon its past, especially to the young, with whom it can both reveal and conceal as much as it chooses, Lady de Bougainville often let fall fragments of her most private history, which an ingenious fancy could easily put together and fit in, so as to arrive at the truth of things—a much deeper truth than she was aware of having betrayed—still, in all my relations to-

ward her I never dared to ask her a direct question. She would have repelled and resented it immediately.

So, even on this first day, I had the sense to be content with learning no more than she condescended to tell me: in fact, I did little else than follow her about the house, and listen while she talked.

Her conversation at once charmed and puzzled me. It was more "like a book," as the phrase is, than any person's I had ever met; yet it sounded neither stilted nor affected. It was merely that, from long isolation, she expressed herself more as people write or think than as they talk. This, not because she was very learned—I believe she was quite correct in saying she had never been a highly-educated woman—the cleverness in her was not acquired, but original; just as her exquisite refinement was not taught, but inborn. Yet these two facts made her society so interesting. Conversing with her and with everyday people was as different as passing from Shakspeare to the daily newspaper.

It was impossible that such an influence should not affect a girl of my age and disposition—suddenly, decisively, overwhelmingly. I still recall, with an intoxication of delight, that soft spring morning, that sunny spring afternoon—for, luncheon over, we went wandering about the house again—when I followed her like a dog from room to room, growing every hour more fascinated, and attaching myself to her with that dog-like faithfulness which some one (whom I need not now refer to, but who knows me pretty well by this time) says is a part of my nature. Well, well, never mind! It might be better, and it might be worse—for me and for others—that I have this quality. I do not think it was the worse, at any rate, for her—my dear Lady de Bougainville.

I fancy she rather liked having even a dog-like creature tracking her steps, and looking up in her face—she had been alone so long. Old as she was, and sad as her life must have been, by nature she was certainly a cheerful-minded person. There was still a curious vitality and elasticity about her, as if in her heart she liked being happy, and seeing other people the same.

She especially enjoyed my admiration of the tapestry-room, a large *salon*—the French would call it; and the word dropped out of her own lips unawares, convincing me more and more of what I did not dare to inquire—her French extraction. She told me when she first came to Brierley Hall—which had been bought from the Crown, to whom the estate had fallen due, after two centuries of wasteful possession by the heirs of some valiant soldier, to whom a grateful monarch had originally presented it—this room was covered with the commonest papering, until some lucky hole made her discover underneath what looked like tapestry. Further search laid bare six beautiful pieces of work, in perfect preservation, let into the wall like pic-

tures: just as they hung there now, in the soft faded coloring which gives to old tapestry a look at once so beautiful, and tender, and ghostly; as if one saw hovering over every stitch the shadow of the long-dead fingers that sewed it.

"How glad you must have been," I said, "when you tore down the horrid papering and found out all this!"

"Yes, I was very glad. I liked all old things. Besides," she went on, "the tapestry is fine in itself; Vandyck even might have designed it. Possibly one of his pupils did: it seems about that period. See how well they are drawn, these knights and ladies, kings and queens, foresters and their falcons, horsemen with their steeds. Such a whirl as it is, such numerous figures, so lifelike, and so good!"

"And what does it all mean, ma'am?"

"Nobody knows; we have never been able to make out. In some things it might answer to the story of Columbus. Here is a man like him coming before a king and queen—Ferdinand and Isabella; they are sitting crowned, you see; and then this looks like his meeting with them afterward, laden with the riches of the New World. But all is mere guess-work; we have no data to go upon. We used to guess endlessly about our new tapestry the first year, then we accepted it as it was, and guessed no more. But think—" and she stood gazing dreamily at these faint-colored, shadowy, life-size figures, which seemed to make the wall alive—"think of all the years it took the artist to design, the seamstresses to complete that tapestry, and how their very names are forgotten—nay, we can not even find out what their handiwork meant to portray! They and it are alike ghosts, as we all shall be soon. 'Man goeth about like a shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain.'"

"Yes," I said, and with the "priggishness" of youth, being conceited over my knowledge of my Bible, I added the remainder of the text: "'he heapeth up riches, and can not tell who shall gather them.'"

The moment I had uttered the words I felt that I had made a mistake—more than a mistake, it was an actual cruelty; one of those chance stabs that we sometimes give to the people we love best, and are most tender over; which afterward we would give the world to recall: and, though it was done most harmlessly, and in pure ignorance, grieve over and feel as guilty about as if we had committed an actual crime.

I saw I had somehow unawares struck Lady de Bougainville to the very heart. Not that she showed it much; she did not speak—no, I forget, I think she did speak, making some commonplace remark about my familiarity with Scripture; but there came a gray shadow all over her face, the features quivered visibly, she turned away, and suddenly sat down in the broad window-sill, clasping her arms together on her lap, and looking out at the view; then beyond the view, up to the rosy floating clouds

of the spring sunset, until gradually its beauty seemed to soothe her and take away her pain.

By-and-by I ventured to ask, chiefly to break the silence, whether she ever sat in this room. It was a very large room, with six windows, and a good view from each; but its size and ghostliness and the dim figures on the walls would make it rather "eerie" to sit in, especially of evenings.

"Do you think so, child? I do not. I often stay here, quite alone, until bedtime. Would you like to see my bedroom? Perhaps you will think that a more 'eerie' place still."

It certainly was. As large fully as the tapestry-room, out of which you passed into it by a short flight of stairs. It was divided in the centre by pillars, between which hung heavy curtains, which at pleasure could be made completely to hide the bed. And such a bed!—a catafalque rather—raised on a dais, and ascended by steps. To enter it would have been like going to bed in Westminster Abbey, and waking up in it one would have felt as if one were a dead hero lying in state.

What an awful place! I asked timidly if she really slept in that room, and quite alone?

"Oh yes," she answered. "The servants inhabit a different part of the house. Once when I was ill, this winter, my maid wanted to sleep in a corner there; she is a good girl, and very fond of me, but I would not let her. I prefer being quite alone. Seventy," she added, smiling, "is not nearly so fearful of solitude as sixteen."

"And you are really not afraid, ma'am?"

"What should I be afraid of? my own company, or the company of those ghosts I spoke of? which are very gentle ghosts, and will never come to you, child," and once more she laid her hand upon my head. I think she rather liked my curls; she said they were "pretty curls." "Child, when you are as old as I am you will have found out that, after all, we must learn to be content with loneliness. For, more or less, we live alone, and assuredly we shall die alone. Who will go with us on that last, last journey? Which of our dear ones have we been able to go with? We can but take them in our arms to the awful shore, see them slip anchor and sail away—whither? We know not."

"But," I whispered, "God knows."

Lady de Bougainville started, as if my simple words had cast a sudden light into her mind. "Yes, you are right," she said, "it is good for us always to remember that: we can not at first, but sometimes we do afterward. So"—turning her eyes on that great catafalque of a bed with its massive draperies and nodding plumes—"I lie down every night and rise up every morning quite content; thinking, with equal content, that I shall some day lie down there to rise up no more."

I was awed. Not exactly frightened: there was nothing to alarm one in that soft, measured voice, talking composedly of things we do not

usually talk about, and which to young people seem always so startling—but I was awed. I had never thought much about death; had never come face to face with it. It was still to me the mysterious secret of the universe, rather beautiful than terrible. My imagination played with it often enough, but my heart had never experienced it—not like hers.

Finding nothing to say that seemed worth saying, I went round the room; examining the pictures which hung upon its walls. They seemed all portraits of different sizes and sorts, from crayon sketches and black silhouettes to full-length oil-paintings—of young people of different ages, from childhood to manhood and womanhood. They had the interest which attaches to all portraits, bad, good, or indifferent, more than to many grander pictures; and I stood and looked at them, wondering who they were, but not daring to inquire, until she solved my difficulty by saying, as we went out of the room,

"These are my children." Not "these were," but "these are."—Her six dead children.

And their father?

I did not ask about him, and there was certainly no portrait in the room which could possibly have been Sir Edward de Bougainville. Once or twice in showing me the house she had cursorily mentioned his name, "Sir Edward bought this," or "Sir Edward preferred that," but it was always as "Sir Edward," never as "my husband"—that fond name which many widows always use, as if tenaciously anxious that death itself should not loosen one link of the precious tie.

Lady de Bougainville retired to dress for dinner, and I had to do the same. Hurrying over my toilet, and eager to re-examine the house at every available minute, I came ignorantly into the only room where we had not penetrated—the dining-room—and there saw, lit up by the blazing fire, the only picture there—a large portrait in oils.

"Who is that?" I took courage presently to ask of the man-servant who was laying the table, with glittering plate and delicate glass more beautiful than any I had ever seen.

"It's Sir Edward, Miss—my lady's husband."

"Oh, of course!" I said, trying to look unconcerned, and speedily quitting the room, for I was a little afraid of that most respectable footman.

But, in truth, I never was more astonished than at this discovery. First, the portrait was in clerical robes; and, though I ought to have known it, I certainly did not know that a "Sir" could be also a "Reverend." Then it was such a common face—good-looking, perhaps, in so far as abundant whiskers, great eyes, rosy checks, and a large nose constitute handsomeness; but there was nothing in it—nothing whatever! Neither thought, feeling, nor intellect were likely ever to have existed under those big bones, covered with comfortable flesh

and blood. Perhaps this was partly the artist's fault. He must have been a commonplace artist, from the stiff, formal attitude in which he had placed his sitter—at a table, with an open book before him and a crimson curtain behind. But Titian himself would have struggled vainly to impart interest to that round forehead, long weak chin, and rabbit mouth, with its good-natured, self-complacent smile.

I contrasted the portrait mentally with the living face of Lady de Bougainville—her sharply-cut yet mobile features, her firm close lips, her brilliant eyes. Could it be possible that this man was her husband? Had I, with the imaginative faculty of youth, constructed a romance which never existed? Had her life been, to say the least, a great mistake—at any rate, so far as concerned her marriage? How could she marry a man like that! I know not whether I most pitied or—may Heaven forgive me my momentary harsh judgment, given with the rash reaction peculiar to young people!—condemned her.

Yes, I was hard; to the living and to the dead likewise. The portrait may not have been like the original: I have seen many a good face so villainously reproduced by an inferior artist that you would hardly recognize your best friend. But, granting that he was handsome—which from after and circumstantial evidence I am pretty sure of—still, Sir Edward de Bougainville could never have had either a very clever or very pleasant face. Not even in his youth, when the portrait was painted. It was a presentation portrait, in a heavy gilt frame, which bore the motto, "From an admiring Congregation," of some church in Dublin.

Then, had Sir Edward been an Irishman? It was decidedly an Irish face—not of the broad and flat-nosed, but the dark and good-featured type. De Bougainville was not at all an Irish name; but I knew there had been a considerable influx of French families into Ireland after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. How I longed to ask questions! but it was impossible.

At dinner my hostess sat with her back to the portrait; I directly opposite to it and her. The candelabra glimmered between us—how I love the delicate, pure light of wax-candles!—glimmered on her softly-tinted old face, set off by the white muslin of her widow's cap, and the rich lace at her throat and on her bosom; upon her shining black silk dress, and her numerous rings. As I have said, her appearance was essentially aristocratic, but she had come to that time of life when only a noble soul will make it so: when the most beautiful woman in the world, if she have only beauty to recommend her, fades into commonplace plainness; and neither birth nor breeding will supply the want of what includes and outshines them both—the lamp burning *inside* the lovely house; and so making it lovely even to its latest moment of decay.

This was exactly what I saw in her, and did not see in Sir Edward de Bougainville. The

portrait quite haunted me. I wondered how she could sit underneath it day after day; whether she liked or disliked to look at it, or whether during long years she had grown so used to it that she scarcely saw it at all. And yet, as we rose to retire, those big staring eyes of the dead man seemed to follow her out of the room, as if to inquire, "Have you forgotten me?"

Had she? Can a woman, after ever so sad a wedded life, ever so long a widowhood, quite forget the husband of her youth, the father of her children? There are circumstances when she might do so—other circumstances when I almost think she ought. Nevertheless, I doubt if she ever can. This, without any sentimental belief in never-dying love—for love can be killed outright; and when its life has fled, better that its corpse should be buried out of sight: let there be no ridiculous shams kept up, but let a silence complete as that of the grave fall—between even child and parent, husband and wife. Still, as to forgetting? Men may; I can not tell: but we women *never* forget.

Lady de Bougainville took my arm—a mere kindness, as she required no support, and was much taller than I—and we went out of the dining-room through the hall, where, in spite of the lamp, the moonlight lay visibly on the scagliola pillars, clear and cold. I could not help shivering. She noticed it, and immediately gave orders that, instead of the drawing-room, we should go and sit in the cedar parlor.

"It will be warmer and more cheerful for you, Winifred; and, besides, I like my cedar parlor; it reminds me of my friend, Miss Harriett Byron. You have read 'Sir Charles Grandison'?"

I had, and burst into enthusiasm over the "man of men," doubting if there are such men nowadays.

"No, nor ever were," said, with a sharp ring in her voice, Lady de Bougainville.

Then, showing me the wainscoting of cedar-wood, she told me how it also had been discovered, like the tapestry and the oak carvings, when Brierley Hall was put under repair, which had occupied a whole year and more after the house was bought.

"Why did you buy it, if it was so dilapidated?" I asked.

"Because we wanted something old, yet something that would make into a family seat—the root of a numerous race. And we required a large house; there were so many of us then. Now—"

She stopped. Accustomed as she had grown to the past, with much of its pain deadened by the merciful anaesthesia of time and old age, still, talking to me, a stranger, seemed to revive it a little. As she stood by the fire, the light shining on her rings—a heap of emeralds and diamonds, almost concealing the wedding-ring, now a mere thread of gold—I could see how she twisted her fingers together, and clasped and unclasped her hands; physical actions implying sharp mental pain.

But she said nothing, and after we had had our coffee—delicious French *café-au-lait*, served in the most exquisite Sèvres china—she took up a book, and giving me another, we both sat reading quietly, almost without speaking another syllable, until my bedtime.

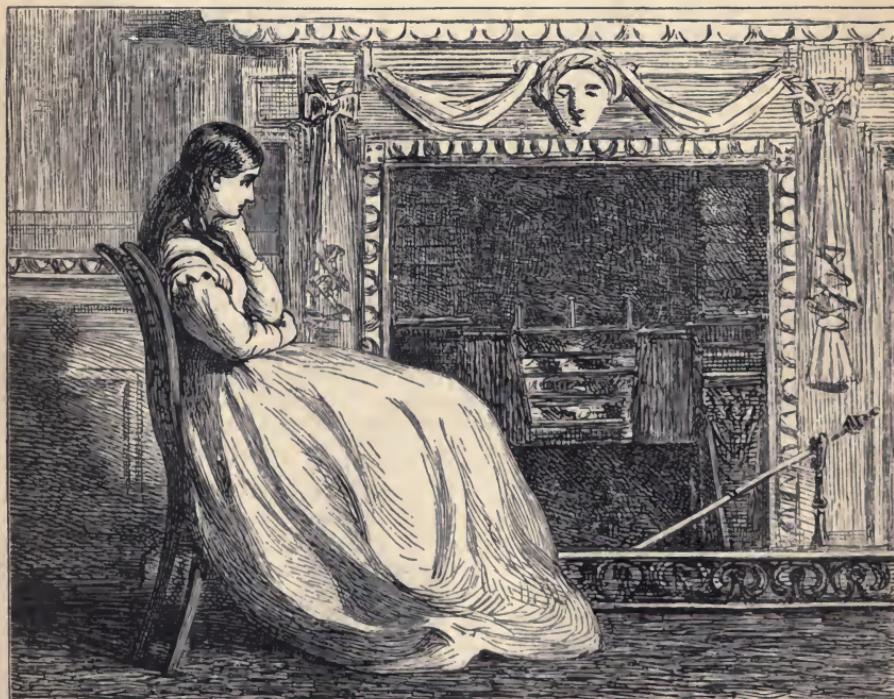
When I went to bed—early, by her command—she touched my cheeks, French fashion, with her lips. Many will laugh at the confession—but that kiss seemed to thrill me all through with a felicity as deep and intense as that of a young knight, who, having won his spurs, receives for the first time the benediction and salutation of his beloved.

When I entered my room it was bright with fire-light and the glow of scarlet curtains. I reveled in its novel luxuries as if I had been accustomed to them all my days. They gratified my taste, my imagination, my senses—shall I say my soul? Yes, a part of one's soul does take pleasure, and has a right to take pleasure, in material comfort and beauty. I had greatly enjoyed wandering over that handsome house, dining at the well-appointed table, spending the evening in the pretty cedar parlor. Now, when I retired into my own chamber, into the innermost chamber of my own heart, how fared it with me?

Let me tell the truth. I sat a while, wrapped in purely sensuous satisfaction. Then I thought of my poor father, sitting in his cold study, having none of these luxuries, nor caring for them. An ugly house to him was the same as a pretty one—a blank street-wall as a lovely view. Pleasant things were altogether wasted upon him;

nay, he despised them, and would have despised me, I knew, had he seen in me any tendency—alas! an hereditary tendency—to luxury and selfish extravagance. Yet I had it, or I feared so sometimes; but perhaps the very fear enabled me to keep it under wholesome control. It sometimes is so. The most strictly truthful person I ever knew said to me once, “I believe I was born a liar, till I found out that lying ran in our blood, and that cured me.”

My cure came in a different way, but not immediately. I well recall the bitterness with which, this night, I sat comparing my bedroom in Brierley Hall with the wretched attic which I tried so hard to make tolerably pretty, and could not. Was I destined always to live thus—struggling vainly against natural tastes, which Providence did not choose to gratify? Were they therefore wrong? Was it any blame to Lady de Bougainville that, in spite of her saying if I were as rich as she, “she should be very sorry for me,” she should be at this minute ascending her beautiful staircase to her stately bedroom—I heard her shut its door—and laying down her lovely hair upon those laced pillows, as she must have done all her life? She had doubtless been born to all these pleasant necessities; I, if I wanted them, must earn them. Were they wrong in themselves, or only wrong when attained at the sacrifice of higher and better things? Does a blessing, which, freely bestowed by Heaven, may be as freely and righteously enjoyed, become a sin when, being denied, it is so madly craved after as to corrupt our whole nature?



WINIFRED'S THOUGHTS.

I was sitting thus, trying to solve in my foolish, childish mind all the puzzles of the universe, with the gaunt, grim, reproachful face of John the Baptist looking down on me from overhead, when a slight knock came to my door—three little knocks indeed. My nerves had been wound up to such a pitch of excitement that I forgot the simple solution of the mystery—that Lady de Bougainville's room had only a small ante-chamber between it and mine; and when the door opened, and a tall figure in a dressing-gown of gray flannel, not unlike a monk or a nun, stood there, I screamed with superstitious terror.

"Foolish child!" was all she said, and explained that she had seen the light shining under my door, and that girls of sixteen ought to have their "beauty-sleep" for a full hour before midnight. And then she asked me what I was doing.

"Nothing, only thinking."

"What were you thinking about?"

From the very first, when she put any question in that way, I never thought of answering by the slightest prevarication—nothing but the direct, entire truth. Nobody could, to her.

"I was thinking about earning a fortune; such a fortune as yours."

She started, as if some one had touched her with a cold dead hand. "What do you know of my fortune or of me?"

"Nothing," I eagerly answered, only adding that I wished I was as rich as she was, or could in any way get riches—with many other extravagant expressions—for I had worked myself up into a most excited state, and hardly knew what I was saying.

Lady de Bougainville must have seen this, for, instead of sending me at once to bed, she sat down beside me and took my hand.

"And so you would like to earn a fortune, as I earned mine, and to enjoy it, as I enjoyed mine? Poor child!" She sat thoughtful a little, then suddenly said, "I do not like even a child to deceive herself. Shall I tell you a story?"

I expected it would have been the story of her life; but no, it was only a little fable of a shepherd who, elevated from his sheepfolds to be vizier to a caliph, was accused of appropriating his master's treasures, and hiding them in a wooden box which he always kept beside him. At last, spurred on by the vizier's enemies, the caliph insisted on seeing the contents of the box, and came with all his courtiers to witness its opening. It contained only a ragged woolen coat, shepherd's sandals, and a crook.

"Now, Winifred, would you like to play the caliph and the envious courtiers? Will you come and look at my hidden treasure?"

She led the way into her bedroom, where the fire-light shone on masses of damask drapery, and mirrors which at each step reproduced our figures. How noble and stately hers was, even in the gray dressing-gown! At the foot of the bed, quite hidden by a velvet cush-

ion which covered it, lay one of those old-fashioned hair-trunks which were in use about half a century ago. She unlocked it, and therein was—what think you?

A gown of white dimity, or what had been white, but was now yellow with lying by, three little girls' frocks of commonest lilac print, two pairs of boys' shoes very much worn, and, patched all over with the utmost neatness, a pair of threadbare boy's trowsers.

This was all. I looked into the box, as I might have looked into a coffin, but I said not a word: her face warned me I had better not. Silently she locked up the trunk again; then, with a tender carefulness, as if she were wrapping up a baby, laid the cushions over it, and, taking my hand, led me back to my room.

"Now go to bed and to sleep, Winifred; but cease dreaming about a fortune, and envy me mine no more."

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY.

I AM going back in my history of Lady de Bougainville nearly fifty years.

But before taking it up at that far-away period, so long before I knew her, and continuing it down to the time when I did know her—where I have just now let it drop—let me say a few words.

To give the actual full details of any human life is simply impossible. History can not do it, nor biography, nor yet autobiography; for, even if we wished, we could not tell the exact truth about ourselves. Paradoxical as it may sound, I have often thought that the nearest approximation to absolute truth is fiction; because the novelist presents, not so much literal facts, which can be twisted and distorted to almost any shape, as the one underlying verity of human nature. Thus Lady de Bougainville's story, as I have gradually gathered it from herself and others, afterward putting together all the data which came into my hands, is given by me probably as near reality as any one not gifted with clairvoyance could give it. I believe I have put "the facts of the case" with as much veracity as most historians. Nor am I bolder in discriminating motives and judging actions than many historians, nay, than we all often assume to be, just as if we were omnipresent and omniscient, toward our poor fellow-words.

But still, any one with common-sense and common perception, studying human nature, must see that certain effects must follow certain causes, and produce certain final results, as sure as that the daylight follows the sun. Therefore when we writers make a story, and our readers speculate about it, and "wonder how it will end," we rather smile at them. We know that if it is true to human life it can end but in one way—subject to various modifications, but still only in one way. Granting such

and such premises, the result must follow, inexorable as fate.

And so in course of years I arrived at Lady de Bougainville's history as accurately as if she herself had written it down: nay, more so, for upon various points of it her tongue was, and ever would have been, firmly sealed, while upon other points circumstances and her own peculiar character made her incompetent to form a judgment. But it was easy enough to form my own, less from what she related than by what she unwittingly betrayed, still more by what I learned—though not till after she was gone—by the one only person who had known her in her youth, the old Irishwoman, Bridget Halloran, who then lived a peaceful life of busy idleness in Lady de Bougainville's house, and afterward ended her days as an honored inmate in mine.

Bridget, as soon as she knew me and grew fond of me, had no reserves; but her mistress had many. Never once did she sit down to relate to me her "history"—people do not do that in real life—and yet she was forever letting fall facts and incidents which, put together, made a complete and continuous autobiography. Her mind, ever dwelling on the past, and indifferent to, or oblivious of, the present, had acquired a vividness and minuteness of recollection that was quite remarkable. I never questioned her: that was impossible. At the slightest indication of impertinent curiosity she would draw in her horns, or retire at once into her shell like any hermit crab, and it was difficult to lure her out again. But generally, by simply listening while she talked, and putting this and that together by the light of what I knew of her character, I arrived at a very fair estimate of the total facts, and the motives which produced them.

Upon these foundations I have built my story. It is no truer and no falser than our reproductions of human nature in history, biography, and romance usually are, and as such I leave it. The relation harms no one. And it will be something if I can snatch out of the common oblivion of women's lives—I mean women who die the last of their race, "and leave the world no pattern"—the strange, checkered life of my dear Lady Bougainville.

And so to begin:

More than half a century ago the Rev. Edward Scanlan came to be curate of the parish in the small West of England town of Ditchley St. Mary's, commonly called Ditchley only.

At that time the Establishment—especially as it existed in the provinces—was in a very different condition from what it is at present. "Orthodoxy" meant each clergyman doing that which was right in his own eyes, as to rubric, doctrine, or clerical government; that is, within certain limits of sleepy decorum and settled common usage. Beyond the pale of the Church there existed a vague dread of the Pope on one side, and Dissent on the other; and people had a general consciousness that the Establish-

ment alone was really "respectable" to belong to; but within its boundary all went smoothly enough. Low-Church, High-Church, Broad-Church, were terms unknown. There was not sufficient earnestness to create schism. One only section of new thinkers had risen up, originating with young Mr. Simeon of Cambridge, who either called themselves, or were called, "Evangelicals," and spoke much about "the gospel," which the more ardent of them fancied that they and they alone had received, and were commissioned to preach. This made them a little obnoxious to their old-fashioned brethren; but still they were undoubtedly a set of very earnest, sincere, and hard-working clergymen, whose influence in the English, and more particularly the Irish Church, was beginning to be clearly felt; only it did not extend to such remote parishes as that of Ditchley.

The Ditchley rector was a clergyman of the old school entirely. When still a young man he was presented to the living through family influence, and had fulfilled its duties decently, if rather grudgingly, his natural bias being in a contrary direction, and his natural disposition being from this or some other reason correspondingly soured. He was a man of education and taste; had traveled much on the Continent when he was only a younger brother, and before it was expected that he would have dropped in, as he did, late in life, for the whole accumulation of the family property—alas! rather too late; for by that time Henry Oldham was a confirmed old bachelor.

Since then he had crept on peacefully to septuagenarianism, the last of his race. He never went to live at Oldham Court, but let it to strangers, and kept on his modest establishment at the Rectory, which was a very pretty place, having once been a monastery, with a beautiful garden, in which he greatly delighted, and over which he was said to spend extravagant sums. Otherwise he lived carefully, some thought penitulously, but he was charitable enough to the poor of his parish; and he read prayers now and then, and preached a sermon, fifteen minutes long, regularly once a month; which comprised for him the whole duty of a clergyman.

I have seen Mr. Oldham's portrait, engraved after his death by the wish of his parishioners. He is represented sitting at his library-table, in gown and bands. His sermon lies before him, and he has the open Bible under his right hand, as in the portrait of the Reverend Sir Edward de Bougainville. But he is very unlike that admired individual, being a little spare old man, with a funny scratch wig, and a keen, caustic, though not unkindly expression; more like a lawyer than a clergyman, and more like a country gentleman than either.

Except this monthly sermon, and his necessary charities, which were no burden to him—Mr. Oldham being, as has been said, a very wealthy man, though nobody knew the precise amount of his wealth—the rector left all his parish responsibilities to his curate, whom he

had picked up, during one of his rare absences from home, soon after his former assistant in the duty—a college chum nearly as old as himself—died.

How such a strong contrast as the Reverend Edward Scanlan ever succeeded the Reverend Thomas Heavisides was a standing wonder to Ditchley. He was young, handsome, and an Irishman, belonging to that section of the Irish Church which coincided with the English “Evangelicals,” except that in Ireland they added politics to religion, and were outrageously and vehemently “Orange”—a term of which, mercifully, the present generation has almost forgotten the meaning.

Mr. Scanlan had been, in his native country, as Ditchley soon discovered—for he had no hesitation in betraying the fact—a popular preacher. Indeed, his principal piece of furniture in his temporary lodgings was his own portrait in that character, presented to him just before he left Dublin—and he maintained the credit of a popular preacher still. On his very first Sunday he took the parish by storm. He literally “roused” the congregation, who were accustomed to do nothing but sleep during the sermon. But no one could sleep during that of the new curate. He preached extempore, which of itself was a startling novelty, alarming the old people a little, but delighting the younger ones. Then his delivery was so loud and energetic: he beat the pulpit cushion so impressively with his white ringed hand; and his sentences rolled off with such brilliant fluency. He never paused a moment for a word—ideas nobody asked for; and his mellifluous Irish accent sounded so original, so charming! His looks too—his abundance of black hair and large blue-black eyes—Irish eyes—which he knew how to make the very most of. Though he was short of stature and rather stumpy in figure compared to the well-grown young Saxons about Ditchley, still all the Ditchley ladies at once pronounced him “exceedingly handsome,” and disseminated that opinion accordingly.

On the top of it—perhaps consequent upon it—came, after a Sunday or two, the further opinion, “exceedingly clever.” Certainly Mr. Scanlan’s sermons were very unlike any thing ever before heard in Ditchley. He seized upon sacred subjects in a dashing, familiar way—handled them with easy composure; illustrated them with all sorts of poetical similes, taken from every thing in heaven and earth; smothered them up with flowers of imagery—so that the original thought, if there was any at all, became completely hidden in its multiplicity of adornments.

Sometimes, in his extreme volubility of speech, Mr. Scanlan used illustrations whose familiarity almost approached the ludicrous, thereby slightly scandalizing the sober people of Ditchley. But they soon forgave him; when a man talks so much and so fast, he must make slips sometimes—and he was so

pleasant in his manner, so meekly subservient to criticism, or so calmly indifferent to it, that it soon died away; more especially as the rector himself had the good taste and good feeling never to join in any thing that was said either for or against his curate. In which example he was followed by the better families of the place—stanch old Tories, with whom a clergyman was a clergyman, and not amenable to the laws which regulate common men. They declared that whoever Mr. Oldham chose was sure to be the right person, and were perfectly satisfied.

Mr. Oldham was satisfied too, or at least appeared so. He always showed Mr. Scanlan every possible politeness, and professed himself perfectly contented with him—as he was with most things that saved himself from trouble. He had had in his youth a hard, in his age an easy life; and if there was one thing he disliked more than another, it was taking trouble. The Irish exuberance of Mr. Scanlan filled up all gaps, socially as well as clerically, and lifted the whole weight of the parish from the old man’s shoulders. So, without any foolish jealousy, Mr. Oldham allowed his charming young curate to carry all before him; and moreover gave him a salary which, it was whispered, was far more than Mr. Heavisides had ever received; nay, more than was given to any curate in the neighborhood. But then Mr. Scanlan was so very superior a preacher; and (alas! for the Ditchley young ladies when they found it out) he was already a married man.

This last fact, when it leaked out, which it did not for a week or two, was, it must be owned, a considerable blow. The value of the new curate decreased at once. But Ditchley was too dull a place, and the young Irishman too great a novelty, for the reaction to be very serious. So, after a few cynical remarks of the sour-grape pattern, as to how very early and imprudently he must have married—the Irish always did—how difficult he would find it to keep a wife and family on a curate’s income, and how very inferior a person the lady would probably be—Mr. Scanlan’s star again rose, and he was generally accepted by the little community.

It is a mistake to suppose that the Irish are unappreciated in England—especially provincial England. Often the slow, bovine, solid Briton is greatly taken by the lively-tempered, easy, mercurial Celt, who both supplies a want and creates an excitement. A gentlemanly, clever, and attractive young Hibernian will drop suddenly down upon an old-fashioned English country town, amuse the men, captivate the women, and end by putting his bridle on the neck of ever so many of these mild, stolid agricultural animals—leading them by the nose completely for a little while—as did the gentleman who had just made his appearance in Ditchley. For weeks nothing was talked of but the Reverend Edward Scanlan—his brilliant preaching, his good looks, his agreeable man-

ners. Every girl in the town would have been in love with him but for that uncomfortable impediment, his wife. Great was the speculation concerning her—what kind of person she was likely to be. Imagination had full time to develop itself: for the curate occupied his lodgings alone for three months, during which time—as he confidentially, and not without much anxious and husband-like feeling, told the matrons of the place—Mrs. Scanlan was awaiting at his mother's house in Dublin the birth of their second child.

Then he had a mother, and she had a house; two facts which, in the paucity of information concerning him, were eagerly seized upon and discussed exhaustively. Indeed these conjugal confessions seemed to open to the young man all the maternal arms in Ditchley—Ditchley town, that is. The county families still hung back a little, pausing till they could discover something certain about Mr. Scanlan's antecedents.

This was not easy. Fifty years ago London itself was very far off from the West of England, and Ireland seemed a *terra incognita*, as distant as the antipodes. Nor, except letting fall in his conversation a good many titled names, which were recognized as belonging to the religious aristocracy of the period, did Mr. Scanlan say much about his family or connections. He was apparently that odd mixture of candor and secretiveness which is peculiarly Celtic—Highland and Irish. While voluble enough concerning himself personally, of his wife, his parents, and his relatives generally—who could not have been numerous, as he was an only child—he said remarkably little.

It is a curious fact, and a contradiction to certain amusing legal fictions concerning the conjugal estate, that whatever a man may be, and however great a personage theoretically, practically his social status is decided by his wife. Not so much by *her* social status or origin, as by the sort of woman she is in herself. King Cophetua may woo the beggar-maid, and if she has a queenly nature she will make an excellent queen; but if he chooses a beggar in royal robes they will soon drop off, and the ugly mendicant appear; then King Cophetua may turn beggar, but she will never make a queen. And so, in every rank of life, unless a man chooses a woman who is capable of keeping up at home the dignity which he labors for in the world, he will soon find his own progress in life sorely hampered and impeded, his usefulness narrowed, his honors thrown away.

Mr. Scanlan was no doubt a very charming man—quite the gentleman, every body said; and his tastes and habits were those of a gentleman, at least of a person who has been well off all his life. Indeed, he every where gave the impression of having been brought up in great luxury as a child, with ponies to ride, unlimited shooting and fishing, etc.—the sort of life befitting a squire's son; on the strength of which, though a clergyman, he became hand

in glove with all the rollicking squires' sons round about.

Ditchley puzzled itself a little concerning his name. Scanlan did not sound very aristocratic, but then English ears never appreciate Irish patronymics. The only time that any one in this neighborhood had ever seen it—(the fact was breathed about tenderly, and never reached the curate)—was upon a stray porter-bottle—“Scanlan and Co.'s Dublin stout”—but that might have been a mere coincidence; no doubt there were many Scanlans all over Ireland. And even if it were not so—if Mr. Scanlan did really belong to the “stout” family—what harm was it? Who had not heard of illustrious brewers? Whitbread in England, Guinness in Ireland—were they not names high in honor, especially among the religious world of the day—the Evangelical set, which, however the old-fashioned, easy-going church people might differ from it, had undoubtedly begun to work a great revolution in the Establishment?

Mr. Scanlan belonged to it, and evidently glorified himself much in the fact. It was such an exceedingly respectable section of the community: there were so many titled and wealthy names connected with it; even a poor curate might gather from his alliance therewith secondary honor. Nevertheless, the county society, which was very select, and not easily approachable, paused in its judgment upon the Reverend Edward Scanlan until it had seen his wife. Then there was no longer any doubt concerning him.

I should think not! I could imagine how she looked the first time she appeared in public, which was at church, for she arrived at Ditchley on a Saturday—arrived alone with her two babies—both babies, for one was just fifteen months the elder of the other—and their nurse, a thorough Irishwoman, very young, very untidy, very faithful, and very ugly. Well could I picture the curate's wife as she walked up the aisle—though perhaps her beauty would at first be hardly perceptible to these good Ditchley people, accustomed to fair Saxon complexions, plump figures, and cheeks rosy and round, whereas hers were pale and thin, and her eyes dark, with heavy circles underneath them. Besides, she was very tall, and slender almost to tenuity; and her early maternity, combined with other cares, had taken from her the first fresh bloom of youth. At nineteen she looked rather older than her husband, though he was her senior by some years. “What a pity!” Ditchley said, in its comments upon her that Sunday; “why will Irishwomen marry so young?”—until they found out she was not an Irishwoman at all.

What she was, or where she came from, they had at first no means of guessing. She spoke English perfectly. Nevertheless, as the ladies who called upon her during the ensuing week detected, she had certainly some sort of foreign accent; but whether French, German, or Spanish, the untraveled natives of Ditchley were

quite unable to discover. And even the boldest and most inquisitive of them found—I can well believe it!—a certain difficulty in putting intrusive questions, or indeed questions of any kind, to Mrs. Scanlan. They talked about her babies, of whom she seemed irrationally proud; about her husband, to whose praises she listened with a sweet, calm, appreciative smile; and then they went away, having found out about her just as much as they knew the week before—viz., that she was Mrs. Scanlan.

Nevertheless she burst upon Ditchley like a revelation; this beautiful, well-bred young woman, who, though only the curate's wife, living in very common furnished lodgings, seemed fully the equal of every lady who called upon her. Yet she made nobody uncomfortable. Those who came to patronize forgot to do it, that was all; while the poorer and humbler ones, who, from her looks at church, had been at first a little afraid of her—doubting she would be “stand-offish” and disagreeable—“found her so pleasant that they were soon quite at their ease, and went away to trumpet her praises far and near.

While she—how did she receive this praise, blame, or criticism? Nobody could find out. She had all the simplicity and naturalness of one who takes no trouble to assert a position which she has had all her life; is quite indifferent to outside shows of wealth or consequence, possessing that within which is independent of either; easily accessible to all comers; considering neither “What do other people think of you?” nor “I wonder what you are now thinking of me?” but welcoming each and all with the calm, gentle graciousness of a lady who has been, to use the current phrase, “thoroughly accustomed to good society.”

Such was the wife whom, much to their surprise after all—for in none of their speculations had they quite reckoned upon such a woman—the new curate introduced to the parish of Ditchley.

She settled his status there, at once and permanently. Nay, she did more, for, with her dignified candor, she explained at once the facts which he had hitherto kept concealed; not upon her neighbors' first visit, but as soon as she grew at all into friendliness with them, even expressing some surprise that neither Mr. Scanlan nor Mr. Oldham—who treated her with great respect, and even had a dinner-party at the Rectory in her honor—should have made public the very simple facts of the Scanlan family history. Her Edward's father was a wealthy Dublin brewer—the identical “Scanlan and Co.”—who had brought his son up to the Church, and was just on the point of buying him a living when some sudden collapse in trade came, the firm failed, the old man died penniless, leaving his old wife with only her own small income to live upon, while the son was driven to maintain himself as best he could. Though he was a popular preacher, and very much sought after, still admiration brought no pounds, shil-

lings, and pence; his fine friends slipped from him; no hope of preferment offered itself in Ireland. At which conjuncture he met Mr. Oldham, made friends with him, and accepted a fat curacy in the land of the Saxons.

This was the whole—a very plain statement, involving no mystery of any kind. Nor concerning herself was there ought to disguise. When her peculiar accent, and certain foreign ways she had, excited a few harmless wonderings, Mrs. Scanlan satisfied them all in the briefest but most unhesitating way, telling how she was of French extraction, her parents being both of an old Huguenot family, belonging to the *ancienne noblesse*. This latter fact she did not exactly state until her visitors noticed a coronet on an old pocket-handkerchief; and then she answered, quite composedly, that her late father, a teacher in Dublin, and very poor, was the Vicomte de Bougainville.

Here at once I give the clew to any small secret which may hitherto have thrown dust in the reader's eyes, but I shall attempt this no more. It must be quite clear to all persons of common penetration who was the lady I am describing.

Mademoiselle Josephine de Bougainville was the only child of her parents, who had met and married late in life, both being poor *émigrés* belonging to the same family, driven from France by the first Revolution. The mother was already dead when Josephine was given, at the early age of sixteen, to Edward Scanlan. I think, in spite of many presumptions to the contrary, that undoubtedly she married him from love, as he her. Perhaps, considering her extreme youth and her French bringing up, it was not exactly the right sort of love—not the love which we like to see our English daughters marry with, quite independent of the desire of parents or friends, trusting to no influence but that of their own honest hearts; but still it was love, and Edward Scanlan, a good-looking, ardent, impulsive young fellow, was just the sort of lover that would be attractive to sweet sixteen. I believe he fell in love with her at church, violently and desperately; and his parents, who never said him nay in any thing, and who had the shrewdness to see that her beauty and her good birth formed an excellent balance to the Scanlan money—nay, would be rather an advantage to the same—instead of resisting, encouraged the marriage. They applied to M. de Bougainville for his daughter's hand, and the poor old Vicomte, starving in his garret, was glad enough to bestow it—to see his child safe settled in a home of her own, and die.

He might have used some persuasion; she might have thought, French fashion, that it was right to marry whomsoever her father wished, and so bent her will cheerfully to his. But I am sure she did not marry against her will, from the simple fact that, to a nature like hers, a marriage without love, or for any thing except love, would have been, at any age, altogether impossible. Besides, I have stronger



"THIS QUIET HOUR MRS. SCANLAN DEVOTED TO WRITING A JOURNAL.

evidence still. Once, in discussing, with regard to myself, this momentous question, Lady de Bougainville said to me, very solemnly—so solemnly that I never forgot her words:

"Remember, Winifred, love alone is not sufficient in marriage. But, wanting love, nothing else suffices—no outward suitability, no tie of gratitude or duty. All break like threads before the wrench of the ever-grinding wheel of daily cares. I had a difficult married life, my dear, but it would have been ten times more so if, when I married, I had not loved my husband."

I find that instead of telling a consecutive story, I am mixing up confusedly the near and the far away. But it is nearly impossible to avoid this. Many things, obviously, I have to guess at. Given the two ends of a fact I must imagine the middle; but I shall imagine as little as ever I can. And I have two clews to guide me through the labyrinth—clews which have never failed through all those years.

Every Saturday night, when her children were in bed, her week's duties done, and her husband arranging his sermon, a task he always put off till the last minute, sitting up late to do it—and she never went to bed until he was gone, and she could shut up the house herself—this quiet hour Mrs. Scanlan always devoted to writing a journal. It was in French, not English; and very brief: a record of facts, not feelings; events, not moralizings: but it was kept with great precision and accuracy. And, being in French, was private; since,

strange to say, her husband had never taken the trouble to learn the language.

Secondly, Lady de Bougainville had one curious superstition: she disliked burning even the smallest scrap of paper. Every letter she had ever received she kept arranged in order, and ticketed with its date of receipt and the writer's name. Thus, had she been a celebrated personage, cursed with a biographer, the said biographer would have had no trouble at all in arranging his data and gathering out of them every possible evidence, except perhaps the truth, which lies deeper than any external facts. Many a time I laughed at her for this peculiarity of hers; many a time I declared that were I a notable person I would take care to give those who came after me as much trouble as possible: instituting such periodical incinerations as would leave the chronicler of my life with no data to traffic upon, but keep him in a state of wholesome bewilderment concerning me. At which Lady de Bougainville only smiled, saying, "What does it matter? Why need you care?"

It may be so. As we decline toward our end, the projected glory and peace of the life to come may throw into dimness all this present life: we may become indifferent to all that has happened to us, and all that people may say and think of us after we are gone. She did, I know. And I might feel the same myself, if I had no children.

Those two children of hers, the little girl and boy, were enough of themselves to make life

begin brightly for young Mrs. Scanlan, even in the dull town of Ditchley. And it was the bright time of year, when Ditchley itself caught the reflected glow of the lovely country around it—rich, West of England country; wide, green, heaving pasture-lands, and lanes full of spring flowers. The first time her little César came home with his chubby hands holding, or rather dropping, a mass of broken blue hyacinths, his mother snatched him in her arms and smothered him with kisses. She felt as if her own childhood were come over again in that of her children.

Besides, the sudden collapse of fortune, which had brought so many changes, brought one blessing, which was a very great one to Josephine Scanlan. Hitherto the young couple had never had a separate home. The old couple, considering—perhaps not unwisely—that the wife was so young and the husband so thoughtless, and that they themselves had no other children, brought them home to live with them in their grand house; which combined establishment had lasted until the crash came.

It could scarcely have been a life altogether to Josephine's taste; though I believe her father and mother-in-law were very worthy people—quite uneducated, having “made themselves,” but gentle, kind, and good. If ever she did speak of them it was always with tenderness. Still, to the poor *émigrés*' daughter, brought up in all the traditions of “blue blood;” taught to take as her standard of moral excellence the chivalry which holds honor as the highest good, and socially, to follow that perfect simplicity which indicates the truest refinement—to such a one there must always have been something jarring in the rude, lavish luxury of these *nouveaux riches*, who, being able to get any thing through their money, naturally concluded that money was every thing. Though her fetters were golden, still, fetters they were: and though she must have worn them with a smiling, girlish grace—she was so much of a child, in years and in character—yet I have no doubt she felt them sometimes. When, all in a day, they dropped off like spiders' webs, I am afraid young Mrs. Scanlan was not near so unhappy as she ought to have been; nay, was conscious of a certain sense of relief and exhilaration of spirits. It was like passing out of a hot-house into the free pure air outside; and, though chilling at first, the change was wonderfully strengthening and refreshing.

The very first shock of it had nerved the shy, quiet girl into a bright, brave, active woman, ready to do all that was required of her, and more; complaining of nothing, and afraid of nothing. Calmly she had lived on with her mother-in-law, amidst the mockeries of departed wealth, till the house and furniture at Merrion Square could be sold; as calmly, in a little lodgings at Kingstown, had she waited the birth of her second child; and then, with equal fearlessness, had traveled from Ireland with the children and Bridget, alone and unprotected,

though it was the first time in her life she had ever done such a thing. But she did it thankfully and happily; and she was happy and thankful now.

True, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Scanlan felt at first the full weight of their changed fortunes. The grand sweep of every thing had not been so complete, or else it had been managed so ingeniously—as wide-awake people can manage these little affairs—as to leave them out of the wreck a good many personal luxuries. By the time the picturesque little cottage—which, being on the rector's land, he had put into good repair and recommended as a suitable habitation for his curate—was ready, there arrived by sea, from Dublin, quite enough of furniture—the remnant of old splendors—to make it very comfortable; nay, almost every lady, in paying the first call upon Mrs. Scanlan at Wren's Nest, said, admiringly, “What a pretty home you have got!”

Then when Mrs. Scanlan returned the visits, and, the term of mourning for her parents-in-law having expired, accepted a few invitations round about, she did so in clothes which, if a little unfashionable in Dublin, were regarded as quite modern in Ditchley; garments so handsome, so well arranged, and so gracefully put on that some of his confidential matron friends said to Mr. Scanlan, “How charmingly your wife dresses! Any one could see she was a Frenchwoman by the perfection of her toilet.” At which Mr. Scanlan was, of course, excessively delighted, and admired his beautiful wife more than ever because other people admired her so much.

He, too, was exceedingly “jolly”—only that word had not then got ingrafted in the English language—in spite of his loss of fortune. The result of it did not as yet affect him personally; none of his comforts were curtailed to any great extent. “Roughing it” in lodgings, with every good house in the parish open to him whenever he chose to avail himself of the hospitality, had been not such a very hard thing. Nor was “love in a cottage,” in summer-time, with roses and jasmines clustering about the door, and every body who entered it praising the taste and skill of his wife, within and without the house, and saying how they envied such a scene of rural felicity, by any means an unpleasant thing.

In truth, the curate sometimes scarcely believed he was a poor man at all, or in anywise, different from the Edward Scanlan with whom every thing had gone so smoothly since his cradle, for his parents having married late in life had their struggle over before he was born. He still dressed with his accustomed taste—a little florid, perhaps, but not bad taste; he had always money in his pocket, which he could spend or give away, and he was equally fond of doing both. He had not, naturally, the slightest sense of the individual or relative value of either sovereigns or shillings, no more than if they had been dead leaves. This pe-

culiarity had mattered little once, when he was a rich young fellow; now, when it did matter, it was difficult to conquer.

His mother had said to Josephine on parting—almost the last thing she did say, for the old woman died within the year—“Take care of poor Edward, and look after the money yourself, my dear, or it’ll burn a hole in his pockets—it always did.” And Josephine had laughed at the phrase with an almost childish amusement and total ignorance of what it meant and implied. She understood it too well afterward.

But not now. Not in the least during that first sunshiny summer, which made Ditchley so pleasant and dear to her that the charm lasted through many and many a sunless summer and dreary winter. Her husband she had all to herself, for the first time; he was so fond of her, so kind to her; she went about with him more than she had ever been able to do since her marriage; taking rambles to explore the country, paying amusing first visits together to investigate and criticise the Ditchley society; receiving as much attention as if they were a new married couple; and even as to themselves, having as it were their honey-moon over again, only a great deal more gay and more comfortable. It was indeed a very happy life for Mr. and Mrs. Scanlan.

As for the babies, they were in an earthly paradise. Wren’s Nest was built among the furze-bushes of a high common, as a wren’s nest should be; and the breezes that swept over were so fresh and pure that the two little delicate faces soon began to grow brown with health—César’s especially. The infant, Adréenne, had always been a small fragile thing. But César grew daily into a real boy, big, hearty, and strong; and Bridget showed him off wherever she went as one of the finest children of the neighborhood.

Thus time went on, marching upon flowers; still he did march, steadily, remorselessly. But it was not till the fall of the year, when a long succession of wet days and weeks made Wren’s Nest look—as a wren’s nest might be expected to look in wintry weather—that the Scanlans woke up to the recollection that they were actually “poor” people.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT are “poor” people—such as I have just stated the curate of Ditchley and his wife to be?

Few questions can be more difficult to answer. “Poor” is an adjective of variable value. I compassionate my next neighbor as a “poor” woman, because she lives in a small tumble-down cottage at the end of my garden, and has nine children, and a sick husband. While my next neighbor but one, who drives about in her carriage and pair, no doubt compassionate me, because in all weathers I have to go on foot. Often when she sweeps past me, trudging along our muddy lanes, and we bow and smile, I can

detect a lurking something, half pity—half—no, she is too kind for scorn!—in her face, which exceedingly amuses me. For I know that if her carriage meets the little chaise and ponies, driven by the lovely Countess whose seat is four miles off, the said Countess will be greatly envied by my wealthy neighbor, whose husband has only one handsome house to live in, while the Earl has six.

Thus, you see, “poor” is a mere adjective of comparison.

But when I call the Scanlans “poor,” it was because their income was not equal to their almost inevitable expenditure. Theirs was the sharpest form of poverty, which dare not show itself as such; which has, or thinks it has, a certain position to keep up, and therefore must continually sacrifice inside comforts to outside shows. How far this is necessary or right remains an open question—I have my own opinion on the subject. But one thing is certain, that a curate, obliged to appear as a gentleman, and mix freely in other gentlemen’s society—to say nothing of his having, unfortunately, the tastes and necessities of a gentleman—is in a much harder position than any artisan, clerk, or small shopkeeper who has the same number of pounds a year to live upon. Especially when both have the same ever-increasing family, only a rather different sort of family, to bring up upon it.

When Mr. Scanlan’s stock of ready-money—that “running account” in the Ditchley bank, which he had thought so inexhaustible, but which ran away as fast as a centipede before the year was out—when this sum was nearly at an end, the young husband opened his eyes wide, with a kind of angry astonishment. His first thought was, that his wife had been spending money a great deal too fast. This was possible, seeing she was still but a novice in house-keeping, and besides she really did not know how much she had to keep house upon. For her husband, proud of his novel dignity as master of a family, had desired her to “leave every thing to him—just ask him for what she wanted, and he would always give it to her: a man should always be left to manage his own affairs.” And Josephine, dutifully believing this, had smiled at the recollection of her mother-in-law’s caution, thinking how much better a wife knew her husband than his own parents ever did, and cheerfully assented. Consequently, she made not a single inquiry as to how their money stood, until there was no money left to inquire after.

This happened on a certain damp November day—she long remembered the sort of day it was, and the minutiae of all that happened on it; for it was the first slight lifting up of that golden haze of happiness—the first opening of her eyes unto the cold, cheerless land that she was entering; the land where girlish dreams and ideal fancies are not, and all pleasures that exist therein, if existing at all, must be taken after a different fashion, and enjoyed in a different sort of way.

Mr. Scanlan had gone into Ditchley in the forenoon, and his wife had been busy making all sorts of domestic arrangements for a change that would rather increase than diminish the family expenditure, and holding a long consultation with her one servant as to a little plan she had, which would lighten both their hands, and indeed seemed, with present prospects, almost a necessity.

For, hard-working woman as Bridget was—and when there is found an industrious, conscientious, tidy Irishwoman, how she will work! with all her heart in it too—still Wren's Nest in winter and Wren's Nest in summer were two very different abodes. You can not keep a little cottage as warm as a good-sized house, or as neat either, especially when the said little cottage has two little people in it just of the age when rich parents find it convenient to exile their children to safe nurseries at the top of the house, to be “out of the way.” Wren's Nest, quite large enough when César and Adrienne were out on the common from morning till night, became small when the poor little things had to be shut up in it all day long. Their voices—not always sweet—sometimes rang through it in a manner that even their mother found rather trying. As to their father—but Mrs. Scanlan had already begun to guess at one fact, which all young married women have to discover—that the more little children are kept out of their father's way the better for all parties.

Moreover, Josephine's husband still enjoyed his wife's company far too well not to grumble a little when she stinted him of it for the sake of her babies. He excessively disliked the idea of her becoming “a family woman,” as he called it, swallowed up in domestic cares. Why not leave all that to the servants? He still said “servants,” forgetting that there was now but one. Often, to please him—it was so sweet to please him always!—Mrs. Scanlan would resign many a necessary duty, or arrange her duties so that she could sit with him alone in the parlor, listening while he talked or read—listening with one ear, while the other was kept open to the sounds in the kitchen, where Bridget might be faintly heard, going about her work and crooning the while some Irish ditty, keeping baby on one arm while she did as much as she could of the household work with the other.

Poor Bridget! With all her good-will, of course, under such circumstances, things were not done as well as they ought to have been, nor were the children taken such care of as their anxious mother thought right. When there was a third child impending some additional household help became indispensable, and it was on this subject that she and Bridget were laying their heads together—very different heads, certainly, though the two young women—mistress and maid, were nearly the same age.

Let me pause for a moment to draw Bridget Halloran's portrait—lovingly, for she was a great friend of mine.

She was very ugly, almost the ugliest woman I ever knew; and she must have been just the same in youth as in age, probably uglier, for time might by then have ironed out some of the small-pox seams which contributed not a little to the general disfigurement of her features. True, she never could have had much features to boast of, hers being the commonest type of Irish faces, flat, broad, round as an apple-dumpling, with a complexion of the dumpling hue and soddleness. There was a small dough-pinch for the nose, a wide slit for the mouth, two beady black-currants of eyes—and you had Bridget Halloran's face complete. Her figure was short and sturdy, capable of infinite exertion and endurance; but as for grace and beauty, not even in her teens did it possess one single line. Her sole charm was that peculiarly Hibernian one—a great mass of very fine blue-black hair, which she hid under a cap, and nobody ever saw it.

But Nature, which had been so niggardly to this poor woman in outward things, compensated for it by putting into her the brightest, bravest, truest, peasant nature—the nature of the Irish peasant who, being blessed with a double share of both heart and brains, is capable alike of any thing good and any thing bad. Bridget, no doubt, had her own capacities for the latter, but they had remained undeveloped; while all the good in her had grown, month by month, and day by day, ever since, at little César's birth, she came as nurse-maid into the service of young Mrs. Scanlan.

To her mistress she attached herself at once with the passionate admiration that ugliness sometimes conceives for beauty, coarseness for grace and refinement. And, they being thrown much together, as mothers and nurse-maids are, or ought to be, this admiration settled into the most faithful devotion that is possible to human nature. At any time, I think, Bridget would composedly have gone to be hanged for the sake of her mistress; or rather, dying being a small thing to some people, I think she would have committed for her sake any crime that necessitated hanging. Which is still not saying much, as Bridget's sole consciousness of, and distinction between, right and wrong was, whether or not Mrs. Scanlan considered it so.

But I have said enough to indicate what sort of person this Irish girl was, and explain why the other girl—still no more than a girl in years, though she was mistress and mother—held toward her a rather closer relation than most ladies do with their servants nowadays. Partly, because Bridget was of Irish, and Mrs. Scanlan of French birth, and in both countries the idiosyncrasy of the people makes the tie between the server and the served a little different from what it is in England. Also, because the enormous gulf externally between Josephine Scanlan *née* De Bougainville, and Bridget Halloran, nobody's daughter (being taken from a foundling hospital), was crossed easier than many lesser distances, especially by that

slender, firm, almost invisible, but indestructible bond of a common nature—a nature wholly womanly. They understood one another, these two, almost without a word, on the simple ground of womanhood.

They were discussing anxiously the many, and to them momentous arrangements for the winter, or rather early spring—the new-comer being expected with the violets—but both servant and mistress had quite agreed on the necessity of a little twelve-year-old nurse-maid, and had even decided on the village school girl whom they thought most suitable for the office. And then Bridget, seeing her mistress look excessively tired with all her morning's exertions, took the children away into the kitchen, and made their mother lie down on the sofa underneath the window, where she could see the line of road across the common, and watch for Mr. Scanlan's return home.

She was tired, certainly; weary with the sacred weakness, mental and bodily of impending maternity, but she was neither depressed nor dejected. It was not her nature to be either. God had given her not only strength, but great elasticity of temperament; she had been a very happy-hearted girl as Josephine de Bougainville, and she was no less so as Josephine Scanlan. She had had a specially happy summer—the happiest, she thought, since she was married; her husband had been so much more her own, and she had enjoyed to the full the pleasure of being sole mistress in her own house, though it was such a little one. I am afraid, if questioned, she would not for one moment have exchanged Wren's Nest for Merion Square.

Nor—equal delusion!—would she have exchanged her own husband, the poor curate of Ditchley, for the richest man alive, or for all the riches he had possessed when she first knew him. She was very fond of him just as he was. She greatly enjoyed his having no valet, and requiring her to wait upon him hand and foot; it was pleasanter to her to walk across the country, ever so far, clinging to his arm, than to be driven along in state, sitting beside him in the grand carriage. And beyond expression sweet to her were the quiet evenings which had come since the winter set in, when no dinner parties were possible, and after the children were gone to bed the young father and mother sat over the fire, as close together as lovers, and making love quite as foolishly sometimes.

"I suspect, after all, I was made to be a poor man's wife," Josephine would sometimes say to herself, and think over all her duties in that character, and how she could best fulfill them, so that her Edward might not miss his lost riches the least in the world, seeing he had gained, as she had, so much better things.

She lay thinking of him on this wise, very tenderly, when she saw him come striding up to the garden-gate; and her heart beat quicker, as it did still—foolish, fond creature!—at the sight of her young husband—her girlhood's

love. She made an effort to rise and meet him with a bright face and open arms.

But his were closed, and his countenance was dark as night—a very rare thing for the good-tempered, easy-minded Edward Scanlan.

"What is the matter, dear? Are you ill? Has any thing happened?"

"Happened, indeed! I should think so! Do you mean to say you don't know—that you never guessed? Look there!"

He threw over to her one of those innocent-looking, terrible little books called bank-books, and went and flung himself down on the sofa in exceeding discomposure.

"What is this?"—opening it with some curiosity, for she had never seen the volume before; he had kept it in his desk, being one of those matters of business which, he said, "a woman couldn't understand."

"Nonsense, Josephine! Of course you knew."

"What did I know?"

"That you have been spending so much money that you have nearly ruined me. Our account is overdrawn."

"Our account overdrawn! What does that mean?" she said—not answering, except by a gentle sort of smile, the first half of his sentence. For she could not have been married these five years without learning one small fact—that her Edward sometimes made "large" statements, which had to be received *cum grano*, as not implying more than half he said, especially when he was a little vexed.

"Mean! It means, my dear, that we have not a half-penny left in the bank, and that we owe the bank two pounds five—no, seven—I never can remember those stupid shillings!—over and above our account."

"Why did they not tell you before?"

"Of course they thought it did not matter. A gentleman like me would always keep a banker's account, and could at any time put more money in. But I can't. I have not a penny-piece in the world besides my paltry salary. And it is all your fault—all your fault, Josephine."

Mrs. Scanlan was startled. Not that it was the first time she had been spoken to crossly by her husband: such an idyllic state of concord is quite impossible in ordinary married life, and in this work-a-day world, where men's tempers, and women's too, are rubbed up the wrong way continually; but he had never spoken to her with such sharp injustice. She felt it acutely; and then paused to consider whether it were not possible that Edward was less to blame than she. For she loved him; and, to fond, idealizing love, while the ideal remains unbroken, it is so much easier to accuse one's self than the object beloved.

"It may be my fault, my friend"—she often called him, affectionately, "my friend," as she remembered hearing her mother address her father as "*mon ami*," and it was her delight to think that the word was no misnomer—every



"SHE LAY THINKING OF HIM ON THIS WISE, TENDERLY."

woman's husband should be, besides all else, her best, and dearest, and closest "friend." "But if it is my fault I did not mean it, Edward. It was because I did not understand. Sit down here, and try to make me understand."

She spoke quite cheerfully, not in the least comprehending how matters stood, nor how serious was the conjuncture. When it dawned upon her—for, though so young and inexperienced, she had plenty of common-sense, and a remarkably clear head at business—she looked extremely grave.

"I think I do understand now. You put all the money we had, which was a hundred pounds, into the bank, and you have fetched it out for me whenever I asked you for it, or whenever you wanted some yourself, without looking how the account stood—the 'balance,' don't you call it?—and when you went to the bank to-day, you found we had spent it all, and there was nothing left. Isn't that it?"

"Exactly so. What a sharp little girl you are; how quickly you have taken it all in!" said he, a little more good-tempered, having

got rid of his crossness by its first ebullition, and being relieved to find how readily she forgave it, and how quietly she accepted the whole thing. For he had a lurking consciousness that, on the whole, he had been a little "foolish," as he called it himself, and was not altogether free from blame in the transaction.

"Yes, I think I have taken it all in," said she, meditatively, and turning a shade paler. "I comprehend that the money I wanted I can not get; that we shall be unable to get any more money for any thing until Mr. Oldham pays you your next half-yearly salary."

"Just so. But don't you vex yourself, my love. It will not signify. We can live upon credit; my father lived upon credit for I don't know how long."

Josephine was silent—through sheer ignorance. Her translation of the word "credit" was moral virtue, universal respect: and she liked to think how deeply her husband was respected in the town; but still she did not understand how his good name would suffice to pay his butcher's and baker's bills, and other expenses, which seemed to have fallen upon

them more heavily than usual this Christmas. To say nothing of another expense—and a strange pang shot through the young mother's heart, to think that it should ever take the shape of a burden instead of a blessing—the third little olive-branch that was soon to sprout up round that tiny table.

"Edward," she said, looking at him entreatingly—almost tearfully, as if a sudden sense of her weakness had come upon her, and instinctively she turned to her husband for help: "Edward, tell me, if we can get no money, not till May, from Mr. Oldham, what am I to do—in March?"

"Bless my soul, I had forgotten that!" and the young man spoke in a tone of extreme annoyance. "You should have thought of it yourself; indeed, you should have thought of every thing a little more. March! how very inconvenient. Well, it can't be helped. You must just manage as well as you can."

"Manage as well as I can," repeated Josephine, slowly, and lifted up in his face her great, dark, heavy eyes. Perhaps she saw something in that face which she had never seen before, some line which implied it was a weaker face, a shallower face than at first appeared. She had been accustomed to love it without reading it much—certainly without criticising it; but now her need was hard. Still harder, too, when wanting it most, to come for comfort and find none; or, at least, so little that it was almost none. "He does not understand," she said to herself, and ceased speaking.

"It is very, very provoking, altogether most unfortunate," continued the curate. "But I suppose you can manage, my dear; laborers' wives do with half the comforts that I hope you will have. Oh dear, a poor curate is much worse off than a day-laborer! But as to the little nurse-maid you were speaking to me about this morning, of course you will see at once that such an additional outlay would be quite impossible. She would eat as much as any two of us; and, indeed, we shall have quite enough mouths to fill—rather too many."

"Too many!"

It was but a chance word, but it had stabbed her like a sword—the first actual wound her husband had ever given her. And, by nature, Josephine Scanlan was a woman of very acute feelings, sensitive to the slightest wound; not to her pride, or her self-esteem, but to her affections and her strong sense of right and justice. She answered not a syllable; she turned away quietly—and stood looking out of the window toward where Ditchley church-spire rose through the rainy mist. Then she thought, with a sudden, startling fancy, of the church-yard below it, where a grave might open yet—a grave for both mother and babe—and so save the little household from being "too many."

It was an idea so dreadful, so wicked, that she thrust it from her in haste and shame, and turned back to her husband, trying to speak in a cheerful voice of other things.

"But what about the two pounds five, or seven—which is it?—that you owe the bank? Of course we must pay it."

"Oh no, they will trust me; they know I am a gentleman."

"But does not a gentleman always pay? My father thought so. Whatever comforts we went without, if the landlord came up for our rent it was ready on the spot. My father used to say, '*Noblesse oblige.*'"

"Your father," began Mr. Scanlan, with a slight sneer in his tone, but stopped. For there stood opposite to him, looking at him with steadfast eyes, the poor Viscomte's daughter, the beautiful girl he had married—the woman who was now his companion for life, in weal or woe, evil report or good report. She might not have meant it—probably was wholly unconscious of the fact—but she stood more erect than usual, with all the blood of the De Bougainvilles rising in her thin cheeks and flaming in her sunken eyes.

"I should not like to ask the bank to trust us, Edward; and there is no need. I paid all my bills yesterday for the month, but there are still three sovereigns left in my purse. You can take them and pay. Will you? At once?"

"There is no necessity. What a terrible hurry you are in! How you do bother a man! But give me the money."

"Edward!" As he snatched at the offered purse, half jest, half earnest, she detained him. "Kiss me! Don't go away angry with me. We are never surely beginning to quarrel?"

"Not a bit of it. Only—well, promise to be more careful another time."

She promised, almost with a sense of contrition, though she did not exactly know what she had to repent of. But when her husband was gone up stairs, and she lay down again, and began calmly thinking the matter over, her sense of justice righted itself, and she saw things clearer—alas! only too clear.

She knew she had erred, but not in the way Edward thought: in quite a contrary direction. How could she, a mistress and mother of a family, have been so unwise as to take every thing upon trust, live merrily all that summer, supplying both herself and the household with every thing they needed, without inquiring a syllable about the money; where it all came from, how long it would last, and whether she was justified in thus expending it!

"Of course, Edward did not think, could not calculate—it was never his way. His poor mother was right; this was my business, and I have neglected it. But I was so ignorant. And so happy—so happy!"

Her heart seemed to collapse with a strange, cold fear—a forewarning that henceforward she might not too often have that excuse of happiness. It was with difficulty that she restrained herself before her husband; and the minute he had left her—which he did rather carelessly, and quite satisfied she was "all right now"—

she burst into such hysterical sobbing that Bridget in the kitchen heard and came in.

But when, with fond Irish familiarity, the girl entreated to know what was the matter, and whether she should run and fetch the master, Mrs. Scanlan gave a decided negative, which surprised Bridget as much as these hysterical tears.

Bridget and her master were not quite upon as good terms as Bridget and her mistress. Mr. Scanlan disliked ugly people; also, he treated servants generally with a certain roughness and lordliness, which some people think it necessary to show, just to prove the great difference between them and their masters, which otherwise might not be sufficiently discernible.

But when she saw him from the window striding across the common toward Ditchley, leaving the house and never looking behind him, though he, and he only, must have been the cause of his wife's agitation, either by talking to her in some thoughtless way, or telling her some piece of bad news which he ought to have had the sense to keep to himself, Bridget felt extremely angry with Mr. Scanlan.

However, she was wise enough to hold her tongue, and devote all her efforts to soothe and quiet her mistress, which was finally effected by a most fortunate domestic catastrophe; César and little Adrienne being found quarreling over the toasting-fork which Bridget had dropped in her hurry, and which was so hot in the prongs that both burned their fingers, and tottered screaming to their mother's sofa. This brought Mrs. Scanlan to herself at once. She sat up, cuddled them to her bosom, and began comforting them as mother's can—by which she soon comforted herself likewise. Then she looked up at Bridget, who stood by her, silent and grim—poor Bridget's plain face was always so very grim when she was silent—and made a half excuse or apology.

"I can't think what made me turn so ill, Bridget. I have been doing almost nothing all day."

"Doing! No, ma'am, it's not doing, it's talking," replied Bridget, with a severe and impressive emphasis, which brought the color to her mistress's cheeks. "But the master's gone to Ditchley, I think, and he can't be back just yet," she added, triumphantly; as if the master's absence at this crisis, if a discredit to himself, was a decided benefit to the rest of the household.

"I know. He has gone on business," said Mrs. Scanlan. And then the business he had gone upon came back upon her mind in all its painfulness; she turned so deadly white once more that Bridget was frightened.

"Oh, ma'am!" she cried, "what in the world has happened?"

(Here I had better state that I make no attempt to give Bridget's brogue. Indeed, when I knew her she had almost none remaining. She had come so early into her mistress's service, and she had lived so long in England, that her Hibernicisms of speech and character had

gradually dropped off from her; all except the warm heart and elastic spirit, the shrewd wit and stanch fidelity, which especially belong to her nation, neutralizing many bad qualities, to which miserable experience forces us to give the bitter adjective—so "Irish.")

"Nothing has happened," said Mrs. Scanlan. "I suppose I am not quite so strong as I ought to be, but I shall soon be all right, I hope. Come, Baby, it's near your bedtime; my blessing! don't cry so! it goes to mother's heart."

She roused herself and began walking up and down with Adrienne in her arms, vainly trying to still her cries and hush her to sleep, but looking herself so wretched all the time, so feeble and incapable of effort, that Bridget at last said, remonstratively:

"You're not to do that, ma'am. Indeed, you're not."

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Scanlan, turning quickly round; "what am I not to do?"

"Not to be carrying that heavy child about. It isn't your business, ma'am, and you're not fit for it. And I'm not going to let you do it, either."

"I must," said Mrs. Scanlan, in a tone so sharp that Bridget quite started. Her mistress was usually excessively gentle in manner and speech—too gentle, Bridget, who had a tongue of her own, and a temper also, sometimes considered. Nevertheless, the sharpness surprised her, but it was away in a minute.

Mrs. Scanlan turned round with tears in her eyes.

"I did not mean to be cross, Bridget. I only meant that I must learn to do a great many things that I have not hitherto done."

What things? Bridget wanted to know. Because *she* thought the mistress did quite enough, and too much; she should be very glad when they had a second servant.

"No, we shall not have a second servant." Bridget stared.

"It is quite out of the question. We can not possibly afford it; Mr. Scanlan says so, and of course he knows."

Josephine said this with a certain air of dignity, by which she wished to put a stop to the "argufying" that she feared; but Bridget, instead, looked so shocked and disconsolate that her mistress took the other tack, and began to console her.

"Really we need not mind much about it. A girl of twelve would have been very ignorant and useless, and perhaps more of a trouble than a help; and I shall be able to help much more by-and-by, and according as I get used to things. I was so very innocent of all house affairs when I came here," added she, smiling, "but I think I grow cleverer every day now."

"Ma'am, you're the cleverest lady I ever knew. And you took to housekeeping like a duck to the water. More's the pity! you that can play music, and talk foreign tongues, and work beautiful with your fingers—and there you are washing dishes, and children's clothes, and

children, with those same pretty fingers. I'd like to tie 'em up in a bag."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Scanlan, laughing outright now: she and Bridget often laughed together, with their French and Irish light-heartedness, even amidst the hardest work and the cloudiest days. "But seriously, think how many mothers have to take care of their own children without any nurse-maid—without any help at all—and I have yours. And three will not be much more trouble than two; indeed, this morning one of my neighbors consoled me by saying that, after two children, even ten did not make much difference."

"And we may have ten!" said Bridget, with a very long face, and a grave personal appropriation of the responsibility, which at first made her mistress laugh again—then suddenly turn grave, muttering to herself something in French. For the first time it had occurred to Mrs. Scanlan that circumstances might arise in which these gifts of God were not altogether blessings. The thought was so painful, so startling, that she could not face it. She drove it back, with all the causes which had suggested it, into the innermost corners of her heart. And with her heart's vision she utterly refused to see—what to her reason's eyes would have been clear enough—that her husband had acted like a child, and been as vexed as a child when his carelessness came to light. Also that the carelessness as to worldly matters, which does not so much signify when a man is a bachelor, and has nobody to harm but himself (if ever such a state of isolation is possible), becomes an actual sin when he is married and has others depending on him—others whom his least actions must affect vitally, for good or ill.

But as she walked up and down the room, rocking Edward's child to sleep—Adrienne was the one of her babies most like the father, César being entirely a De Bougainville—Josephine could not think hardly of her Edward. He would grow wiser in time, and meanwhile the least said or thought of his mistake the better. Nor did she communicate any further of it to Bridget, beyond saying that, besides omitting the little nurse-maid, they would henceforward have to be doubly economical; for Mr. Scanlan and herself had decided they were spending a great deal more than they ought.

"Ugh!" said Bridget, and asked no more questions; for she was a little afraid of even her sweet young mistress when it pleased her to assume that gentle reserve. But the shrewd servant, nevertheless, made up her mind—that by fair means or foul, by direct inquiry, or by the exercise of that sharp Irish wit in which the girl was by no means deficient—she would find out what had passed between the husband and wife, to make her mistress so ill. Also, whether there was any real occasion for her master's extraordinary stinginess.

"It's not his way! quite the contrary!" thought she, when, while Mrs. Scanlan was hushing baby to sleep, she slipped up and put

to rights the one large room which served as bedroom for both parents and children: finding Mr. Scanlan's clothes scattered over César's little bed; crumpled shirts without end (for he had been dressing to dine out), and half a dozen pairs of soiled lavender gloves. "What business has he to wear lavender kid gloves, I should like to know?" said Bridget to herself, rather severely. "They'd have bought Master César two pair of boots, or the mistress a new bonnet. Ugh! men are queer creatures—I'm glad I wasn't a man, any how!"

CHAPTER III.

AFTER this day the curate's family began painfully to recognize that they were really "poor" people.

Not that Mr. Scanlan's salary was small; indeed, the rector had been most liberal: but the real property of a family consists, not so much in what comes in, as in what goes out. Had they never been richer than now, no doubt they would have considered themselves tolerably well off, and have received smiling even the third little "encumbrance," which ere long made the cottage too busy and too noisy for Mr. Scanlan to "study" there with any sort of comfort. Not that he was fond of reading, or ever read very much; but he liked to have his books about him, especially the Greek and Latin ones: it "looked well," he said. He had come to Ditchley breathing a great aroma of classical learning, and he did not like it to die out: it gave him such an influence in the parish. So he was much annoyed to find that it was now difficult to keep up the appearance of a man of literature; for instance, his few books had daily to be cleared away that the family might dine upon his study-table—and though that rarely incommode him personally, he being so often absent at dinner-hour—and invariably on "fast-days," as Bridget called them, she having been once a Catholic. She was not one now; having soon expressed her willingness to turn Protestant, or indeed any religion that Mrs. Scanlan chose: she wished to go to heaven with her mistress, she said, and how she went, or by what road, was of no great consequence.

These "fast-days" were always made a joke of, by both her, her mistress, and the children, who were brought up to accept them as natural circumstances. But the truth was, the little family did not eat meat every day; they could not afford it. They always chose for their maigre days those days when Mr. Scanlan was out—which happened pretty frequently—for he had all the parochial visiting to do: the parish was large and the houses scattered. Moreover, he was so agreeable—had such a deal to say for himself, and such a pleasant Irish way of saying it, that every body was delighted to see him. His welcome from house to house was universal, and his invitations were endless. At first he used to refuse them, not liking to

go any where without his wife; but when her accompanying him began to grow difficult, nay impossible, he refused less and less. The neighbors were so very pressing, he said, and he could not well offend his own parishioners. Gradually, as summer advanced, their eagerness for his society grew to that pass that he might have dined away from home every day in the week; in fact he often was absent three or four days out of the seven.

At first, I think, his young wife fretted a good deal about this. She did not care to have him stopping at home all day long; the children were a weariness and a trouble to him, for there was no nursery to hide them in; and besides, she could not do her duty properly to them when he was there. Nor to him—as she often vexed herself with thinking—when they, poor little pets! were always wanting her, and always in the way. But she would have preferred to see her husband come regularly home of evenings. She would have liked to sit and watch for him across the common at a certain fixed hour; to have known that—punctual as the sun—he would have come in and shone upon her; her sunrising being at the ordinary sunsetting—the close of the day. It would have been good for her, and sweet to her, she knew, if, though he disliked to be troubled and worried—and she should always avoid that—he had taken a kindly, husbandly interest in things at home. It would have helped her, and made her strong, braver, and fresher to bear the thousand little household burdens, that are, in the total, so heavy—men have little idea how heavy!—upon women's weak shoulders. Especially young women—who have yet to learn how God fits the back to the burden, and how He never suffers the brave heart to fail, however tottering may be the feeble knees.

But Mr. Scanlan did not seem to understand these little difficulties of his wife. He was very kind, very affectionate; but it never occurred to him that she, being young and inexperienced, needed help as well as love, shelter as well as sunshine. He was very good when all was smooth and bright, but when any temporary cloud came over Wren's Nest, as clouds will come—slight sicknesses of the children, or small domestic cares of any kind—he just slipped away, and left her to bear the brunt of the battle. True, when he reappeared, he overwhelmed her with praise for having borne it so exceedingly well; which was most pleasant to his wife's heart—so pleasant that it seldom occurred to her till afterward that the battle might have been easier had she not been left to fight it single-handed.

Still, a husband at home all day is a great nuisance, especially with a young family; and she was not always sorry for Mr. Scanlan's absence, particularly at dinner-time. Women can put up with so many things that are intolerable to men. When butcher's meat ran short, Bridget developed quite a genius for puddings, which delighted the children amazingly. And then

their mother tried her delicate hand at various French cookeries which she remembered out of "the days of her youth," as she began to call them now, and especially the *potau-feu*, which her mother used to see when, as the young demoiselle of the château, she was taken by her nurse to visit old Norman cottages. She loved to tell about this wonderful Normandy to her little César, who listened eagerly, with the precocity not rare in eldest children, when the circumstances of the household compel them to the lot—often a most happy one—of being constantly under the mother's eye, and constituted the mother's principal companion.

These details I take from the Saturday night's journal, which Mrs. Scanlan kept so scrupulously and for so many years. It was, as I have said, written in French, her fondly-remembered native tongue, but it was not at all French in its style, being quite free from that sentimental exaggeration of feeling which makes French journals and letters of the last century or half-century seem so queer and affected to our British undemonstrativeness. Hers was as plain, as accurate, as if she had been the "thorough Englishwoman"—into which, as their summit of well-meant praise, her neighbors told her she was growing. She records the fact, but makes no comment thereon.

Nor will I. I believe firmly in the science of anthropology; that you might as well expect to evolve certain qualities out of certain races, as to grow a rose out of a tulip; but you can modify both rose and tulip to an almost infinite extent, cultivating their good points, and repressing their bad ones; and to quarrel with a tulip because it is not a rose is certainly an act of supreme folly, even though one may like the rose far better. I myself own to having a warm love for roses, and a strong aversion to tulips; yet when a certain great and good man once took me to his favorite tulip-bed, and dilated on its merits, exhibiting with delighted admiration the different sorts of blooms, I felt tempted to say within myself, Can I have been mistaken? is a tulip a desirable, not a detestable, flower after all? And I was such a tender hypocrite to my old friend that I had not the courage to confess I had detested tulips all my life, but meant henceforward to have a kindly feeling toward them—for his sake.

So those of my readers who hate French people and Irish people, with their national characteristics—may be a little lenient to both, as they read on farther in this story.

Mrs. Scanlan's neighbors, though they did pay her these doubtful compliments as to her foreign extraction, were very kind, and neighborly. They admired her without being envious of her, for indeed there was no need. She came into competition with none of them. The young ladies, unto whom her beauty might have made her a sore rival, were quite safe—she was already married. The matrons, with whom she might otherwise have contested social distinc-

tion, were also secure—she never gave entertainments, and competed for the queenship of society with no one. The one field in which, had she fought, she must certainly have come off victorious, there being no lady for miles round who was her equal in qualities which I think are more French than English—in the gifts of being a good talker, a better listener; of making people comfortable together without knowing why; and of always looking so sweet and pleasant and pleased with every thing that all people were perfectly pleased, both with themselves and her—from that grand arena Mrs. Scanlan retired; and so soon that nobody had time to dislike her for succeeding in it.

She had another quality which made her popular at Ditchley—she always sympathized with her neighbors, and interested herself warmly in their affairs, without ever troubling them with her own. I remember a certain line out of a once popular ballad, which then struck me as a very unfair balance of things, but which I have since recognized as the easiest and safest plan after all, with regard to all but the one or two intimate friends that one makes in a lifetime—

“So let us hope the future as the past has been
will be,
I will share with thee thy sorrows, and thou thy
joys with me.”

It illustrates exactly the unconscious creed and daily practice of Josephine Scanlan.

Thus, narrow-minded as Ditchley was in some things—as all country towns necessarily must be, and were then, before the era of railways, much more so than now—it had a warm heart, and kept the warmest side of it to the curate’s wife, a stranger though she was. Of her small outside world Mrs. Scanlan had nothing to complain. It may have criticised her pretty freely; very likely it did; but the criticisms fell harmless. She never heard them, or if she had heard, would not have heeded. She was so entirely free from ill-nature herself that she never suspected it in others. If people talked about her, what harm did it do her? She was very sure they never said any thing unkind.

And, strange to relate, I believe they never did. She was so entirely simple and straightforward—ay, from the first day when she explained, quite unhesitatingly, the dire mystery which had agitated Ditchley for weeks, the Scanlan and Co. porter-bottle!—that spite laid down its arrows unused, meanness shrank ashamed into its own dark corners, and even malice retracted abashed before the innocent brightness of her unconscious face.

“Every body likes me,” she said of herself at this time. “I really don’t know why they do it, but I am sure they do. And I am so glad. It is such a comfort to me.”

Was she beginning to need comfort—outside comfort—even already?

Her outside gayety was certainly ceasing by slow degrees. She was invited as usual, with her husband; but gradually it came to be an

understood thing that Mr. Scanlan went and Mrs. Scanlan remained at home. “She could not leave the baby,” was at first a valid and generally accepted excuse, and by the time it ceased to be available her absence had become such a matter of habit that nobody wondered at it. For a while the “every body” who liked her so much missed her a little, and even remonstrated with her as to whether she was not sacrificing herself too much to her family, and whether she was not afraid of making Mr. Scanlan angry in thus letting him go out alone. “Oh no!” she would reply, with a faint smile, “my husband is not at all angry. He quite understands the state of the case.”

He did understand, after his fashion—that is, he presently discovered that it is somewhat inconvenient to take into society a wife who has no carriage to go out in, but must spoil her elegant attire by walking. Or still worse, who has no elegant attire at all, and wherever she appears is sure to be dressed more plainly than any lady in the room.

It may seem ridiculously small, but the subject of clothes was now growing one of the burdens of Mrs. Scanlan’s life. She had never thought much of dress before her marriage, and afterward her rich toilet had been accepted by her both pleasantly and naturally. Every body about her dressed well, and so did she, for her husband liked it. Fortunately her good clothes were so many that they lasted long after her good days—that is to say, her rich days—were done.

But now the purple and fine linen began to come to an end, and were hopeless of replacement. The first time she went to Ditchley to buy herself a new dress, which her husband declared she must have, she was horrified to find that a gown like one of her old worn-out ones would involve the sacrifice of two months’ income to the little household at Wren’s Nest. So her dream of a new silk dress vanished: she brought home a muslin one, to the extreme indignation of Mr. Scanlan.

Poor man! he could not understand why clothes should wear out, and as little why they should not be perpetually renewed. He had never seen his mother dress shabbily—why should his wife do so? His wife, upon whom his credit rested. If she had only herself to consider it would not have signified; but a married lady—the Reverend Edward Scanlan’s wife—was quite another thing. He could not see the reason for it: she must be learning slatternly ways; yielding to matronly untidiness, as he saw young mothers sometimes do—which he always thought a great shame, and a great unkindness to the husband. Which arguments were perfectly true in the main, and Josephine recognized the fact. Yet the last one went rather sharply into the young matron’s heart.

She changed her style of dress altogether. Her costly but no longer fresh silks and satins were put away—indeed, they fell away of themselves, having been remodeled and altered to

the last extremity of even French feminine ingenuity. She now appeared almost exclusively in cotton print of a morning, in white dimity of an afternoon: dresses which Bridget could wash endlessly, and which each week looked fresh and new again. Her children the same. She could not give them a clean frock every day, as their father wished—every other child he saw had always a clean frock on, and why not his children?—but she dressed them in neat blue-spotted pinafores—blouses she called them—the familiar French name—with a plain leather belt round the waist—and they looked so pretty, so very pretty!—or she and Bridget thought so many a time.

It is a curious and sad indication of how things changed after the first sunshiny summer at Wren's Nest, that the mistress and servant seemed to have settled their domestic affairs together, and shared their domestic griefs and joys, very much more than the mistress and master. Whenever there was a sacrifice to be made, or a vexation or fatigue to be endured, it was they who suffered—any how, *not* Mr. Scanlan. Mrs. Scanlan contrived to shield her husband—almost as she did her little children—from any household perplexity or calamity, and especially from a certain dim sound heard in the distance, every day approaching nearer and nearer—the howling of that blatant beast, “the wolf at the door.”

“Hardships are so much worse to him than to me,” she would reason. “With me it is but just going back to old times, when I lived at home with my father—and we were so very poor—and so very happy too, I think—whereas with my husband it is different. He has been rolling in money all his life—poor Edward!”

No doubt this was true. Nor do I wish to judge the curate more harshly than his wife judged him. Besides, people are variously constituted; their ideals of happiness are different. I can imagine that when Josephine Scanlan sat in front of her neat cottage—with César and Adrienne playing at her feet, and her baby-boy asleep on her lap—sewing hard, for she had never done sewing—yet stopping a minute now and then to refresh her eyes with the sweet landscape—green, low hills, smooth and sunny, which shut out the not very distant sea, beyond which lay *la belle France*, which she had always dreamed of, but never beheld—I can imagine, I say, that it mattered very little to Josephine Scanlan whether she lived in a great house or a small one; whether she went clad in satin and velvet, or in the common dimity gown, which Bridget often sat up half the night to wash and iron for Sundays, and in which, as she went to church with a child in either hand, poor Bridget declared, the mistress looked “like an angel just dropped from the sky.”

Whether the rest of the congregation were of that opinion can not now be discovered. They still paid occasional visits to Wren's Nest, stopping in carriage-and-pair at the garden-gate,

and causing Bridget a world of flurry to get a clean apron and smooth her hair before rushing to open it. But it is a very different thing, paying visits in a carriage after an idle morning, and paying them on foot after a morning's hard work in arranging the house affairs and looking after the children. Mrs. Scanlan had to explain this—which she did very simply—to such of her husband's parishioners as were specially kind to her, and with whom she would have liked to associate, had fate allowed. Her excuses were readily and graciously accepted; but, after a time, the natural results of such an unequal balance of things ensued. Her visitors became fewer and fewer: sometimes, in winter, whole weeks passed without a single foot crossing the threshold of Wren's Nest.

Necessarily, too, there came a decline in other branches of parish duty that Mr. Scanlan considered essential, and urged his wife to keep up; which she did at first to the utmost of her power—Dorcas societies, district visiting, village school-feasts, and so on; various forms of benevolence which had lain dormant until the young curate came. Ditchley, having a very small number of poor, and abounding in wealthy families with nothing to do, soon found charity a charming amusement; and the different schemes which the new clergyman started for its administration made him very popular.

But with Mrs. Scanlan the case was different.

“I can't sit making clothes for little negroes, and let my own children run ragged,” said she once, smiling: and arguing half in earnest, half in jest—for she found that the latter often answered best—with her husband, who had been sharply reproving her. “And, Edward, it is rather hard to sit smilingly distributing fuel and blankets to the ‘believing poor,’ as you call them, when I remember how thinly-covered is poor Bridget's bed, and how empty our own coal-cellars. Still, I will do my best, since you wish it.”

“Do so—there's a dear girl!” replied he, carelessly kissing her. “Charity looks so well in a clergyman and a clergyman's wife. And, besides, giving to the poor is lending to the Lord.”

Mrs. Scanlan cast a keen glance at her husband—she always did when he said these sort of things. She had begun to wonder how much they meant—at least how much he meant by them, and whether he really considered their meaning at all. I am afraid, for a clergyman's wife, she was not as religious a woman as she ought to have been; but she had had too much of religion when she lived in Merrion Square. In that particular set to which her husband belonged its cant phraseology had been painfully dinned into her ears. She recognized all the intrinsic goodness of the Evangelical sect, their sincere and earnest piety; but she often wished they could do without a set of stock phrases—such as Edward Scanlan had just used—which gradually came to fall on her ear as mere words, implying nothing.

"Lending to the Lord!" said she. "I wish He would begin to pay me back a little that He owes me." "I wish He would send me a new pair of shoes for each of the children. They want them badly enough."

At which Mr. Scanlan looked horrified, especially as this unfortunate speech had been made in presence of his rector, Mr. Oldham, who had just come in for a call. Possibly he did not hear, being very deaf, and using his deafness sometimes both conveniently and cleverly.

He was the one visitor whose visits never ceased, and were always welcome; for they caused no inconvenience. If the mother were busy, he would be quite content to talk to the children; who liked him well enough, though they were a little afraid of him, chiefly through their father's always impressing upon them that they must behave so exceedingly well when they went to the Rectory, which was now almost the only house in the neighborhood they did go to. At first, when César and Adrienne had acquired sufficiently walking capabilities and good manners, their father amused himself by taking them about with him pretty often; but being not angels, only children, they sometimes vexed him considerably. They would get tired and cross; or, from the great contrast of living at home and abroad, they would be tempted—poor little souls—to overeat themselves, which naturally annoyed the curate much. By degrees both they and their mother found that going out with papa was not unmixed felicity; so that when the habit was given up it was a relief to all parties.

Gradually the parents and children seldom appeared in public all together, except when they were invited to the Rectory—as they had been lately—to enjoy a strawberry feast, in the garden of which its owner was so justly proud.

"I am glad you approve of my roses," said Mr. Oldham, when, with a half deprecating, half threatening look at his wife, lest she should make some other unlucky observation, Mr. Scanlan had disappeared on important parish business. "I often think, Madame"—(he changed his old-fashioned "Madam" into Madame, out of compliment to her birth, and because he liked to air his French a little)—"I think my garden is to me what your children are to you. I only hope it may be equally flourishing, and may reward me as well for all my care."

The rector was sitting in the porch, his stick between his knees—he always wore breeches, gaiters, a long coat, and a large clerical hat—watching César, who was pulling up weeds in the somewhat neglected borders in front of the garden, but doing laborer's work with the air and mien of a young nobleman in disguise—a real Vicomte de Bougainville. One does see these anomalies sometimes, though I grant not often; poor gentlefolks' children are prone to sink to the level of the ordinary poor; but Josephine had taken great pains in the up-bringing of hers. As her eyes followed the direction

of Mr. Oldham's, and then both their eyes met, there was in one countenance a touch of envy, in the other of pity—which accounted for his frequent visits and the kindly welcome which she always gave him.

That is, of late years. At first Mrs. Scanlan had been rather shy of her husband's rector, perhaps like the children, because her husband always impressed upon her the importance of being civil to him. Not until she found this needless—that the little old bachelor exacted nothing from her, and that, moreover, there was nothing to be got out of him—did Josephine become as friendly with Mr. Oldham as she was with her other neighbors. Her coldness seemed rather to amuse him; nor did he ever take offense at it. He admired openly her beauty, her breeding, her good sense; and with his own pedigree, a yard long, hanging up in his hall, it is probable that he did not think the less of his curate's wife for being descended from so many noble De Bougainvilles.

What the old rector thought of his curate people never quite discovered. He kept his opinion to himself. When the parish went crazy about Mr. Scanlan, his beautiful sermons, his many accomplishments, Mr. Oldham listened, silent; when, as years ran on, a few holes were picked in the curate's coat, he listened, equally silent. But he himself always treated Mr. Scanlan with pointed respect, courtesy, and consideration.

He sat watching the children—there were four now, "baby" being exalted into Louis, and another little white bundle lying across Mrs. Scanlan's lap, as she sat busy at her ceaseless needle even while she conversed with her guest.

"Another girl, I understand, for I am to have the pleasure of christening her next Sunday. Are you offended with me, Madame, for declining to be godfather? As you are aware, your husband asked me."

She was not aware, and would have disliked it extremely; but she would not betray either fact, and therefore only smiled.

"What do you mean to do with your eldest son?" pointing to César. "As I was saying to his father, it is high time he went to school. But Scanlan tells me he prefers teaching him himself."

"Yes," said Josephine, briefly, for her visitor had touched upon a sore point. In early days her husband had been very proud of his "son and heir," who was a fine little fellow, the image of the grandfather whose name he bore—for all the children had French names, Mr. Scanlan not caring to perpetuate the Dennises and Judiths of his ancestry. He had insisted on educating César himself—who could so well teach a boy as his own father? Only, unfortunately, the father had no aptitude for teaching, was extremely desultory in his ways, and, as he gave the lessons chiefly for his own amusement, took them up and relinquished them whenever it suited him. Conse-

quently, things went hard with little César. He was a bright, bold, noble lad, but he was not particularly clever nor overfond of his book. Difficulties ensued. Not that Edward Scanlan was one of your brutal fathers: he never lifted his hand to strike his son—I should have liked to have seen the mother's face if he had!—but he made her perpetually anxious and restless, because “papa and César did not get on together,” and because, in spite of papa's classical acquirements, her big boy, the pride of her heart, was growing up a great dunce.

Yet when she suggested sending him to school, Mr. Scanlan had opened eyes of the widest astonishment. What necessity was there? when he could teach him himself at home. Besides, how could they possibly afford the expense of schooling, when only lately she had told him, the father of the family, that he must do without a suit of new clothes for another six months? Differences ensued, which ended in César's remaining another year at home, while his mother learned Latin in order to teach him herself. And, somehow or other, his father appeared at the next visitation in a bran-new suit of best London-made clerical clothes, dined with the Archbishop, and preached a sermon on the text of “Charity suffereth long and is kind;” which was so much admired that he came home covered with glory, and, except that it was, fortunately, extempore, would have gone to the expense of printing and publishing it immediately.

Thus, when Mr. Oldham spoke, Josephine replied with that quick “Yes,” and over her face came the shadow which he, who had all the quick observation which often belongs to deaf people, detected at once, and changed the conversation.

“I have my newly-married cousin, Lady Emma Lascelles, coming with her husband to dine with me on Thursday; will you come too? I asked Mr. Scanlan, and he accepted immediately.”

“Oh yes, of course he will be most happy.”

“I should like you to meet Lady Emma,” pursued the old gentleman; “she was a nice little girl, and I dare say has grown up a sweet young woman. She will be sure to take to you—I mean, you will suit her better than most of the ladies of Ditchley.”

“Indeed!” said the curate's wife, smiling.

“You see they will all stand in such awe of her”—and there was a slight satirical expression on the rector's thin mouth. “It is not often a ‘lady’ in her own right comes our way. Though the most innocent eagle that ever was, Emma will flutter our dove-cote, even as Coriolanus ‘fluttered the Volscæ in Corioli.’ You will see!”

“Shall I? No; I fear I shall not. I am sorry to decline your kindness, Mr. Oldham, but you know I never go out now. I have not been at a dinner-party for years.”

“So your husband said; but he said also that meeting Lady Emma was an exceptional

case, and that I was to persuade you to go, as he wished it extremely.”

“Did he? did he really?” said Josephine, with a sudden glow of pleasure; she had not grown quite insensible to the amusements of life, still less to that keenest enjoyment of them—to a wife—the consciousness that her husband likes to enjoy them with her; that he is proud of her, and admires her himself, besides having a natural satisfaction in seeing other people admire her too. But scarcely had she spoken than the glow faded. “I think you must have mistaken him, Mr. Oldham. My husband knows very well I do not visit. Indeed, I can not do it.”

“Why not?”

The rector was a daring man to put the question, but he had often wished to get an answer to it. Observant as he was, his observation only went a certain length; and intimate as Mrs. Scanlan now was with him, her intimacy had its limits too. So neat was Wren's Nest whenever he called, so great was its mistress's feminine ingenuity in keeping in the back-ground all painful indications of poverty, that the rich man, who had been rich all his days, never guessed but that his curate was exceedingly comfortable in his circumstances, indeed, rather well off for a curate. Thus, when he asked “Why not?” he had no idea that he was putting any painful or intrusive question, or saying any thing beyond an innocent joke, which, as an old man and a clergyman, he might well venture. When he saw Mrs. Scanlan look grave and troubled he drew back immediately.

“I beg your pardon. Pray, do not answer me.”

“No; I think I had rather answer, once for all,” said she, after a pause. “It is but honest, and it will prevent your thinking me ungrateful or rude. I have given up visiting, because, in truth, we can not afford it.”

“I am aware, Madame,” said Mr. Oldham, “that fate, which has given you almost every thing else, has denied you riches; but I think that should not affect you socially—certainly not in the visits with which you honor my house. Let me hope still to see you on Thursday.”

“I can not,” she said, uneasily; then laughing and blushing, “If there were no other, there is one very ridiculous reason. This is a grand bridal party, and I have no suitable clothes!”

“Why not come as you are? This is white, touching, half reverentially, half paternally, her dimity dress. “Would not this do?”

She shook her head. “I should not mind it; if I were dressed ever so plainly I should like to come. But—my husband—”

She stopped, for the same slightly satirical expression crossed the old man's mouth.

“I have no doubt my friend Scanlan has perfect taste; and, being an old bachelor, I can not be expected to understand how husbands feel on the subject of their wives' dress. Still,

if I had a wife, and she looked as charming as Madame looks at this moment, whatever her costume might be, I should— But we will not further discuss the subject. Thursday is a good way off; before then I shall hope to bring you or your husband, or both, round to my opinion. May I go into the house, Mrs. Scanlan? for it is growing rather chill outside for an old man like me."

He went in, and sat an hour or more with her and the children; but, though he talked on indifferent subjects, and asked no further questions, she could see his sharp eyes wandering here, there, and every where, as if a new light had broken in upon him, and he was anxious to discover every thing he could respecting the internal economy of Wren's Nest. Such a shabby little nest as it was now growing! with carpets wearing threadbare and curtains all darned, and furniture which had to be kept neat and pretty by every conceivable device—all those things which a woman's eye at once discovers, a man's never, unless they are brought pointedly to his notice, or his attention is awakened so that he begins to hunt them out for himself.

Mr. Oldham talked a good deal, and looked about him a good deal more; but not a syllable said he with reference to the matter which, the moment she had referred to it, Josephine could have bit her tongue off for doing so. Not that she was ashamed of her poverty, in itself—she had been brought up in too lofty a school for that—but she was ashamed of the shame her husband felt concerning it. And any thing like a betrayal of it before his patron would have seemed like begging for an increase of income, which she knew Mr. Scanlan desired, and thought his just due, and which every half-year she had some difficulty to keep him from applying for.

Therefore it was a real relief to Josephine when the rector said not a word more of the dinner-party, until, just as he was leaving, he observed, "By-the-by, I quite forget, I had come to consult you upon whom I should invite to meet Lady Emma."

"Me!"

"Who so fitting? Are you not hand-in-glove with all our neighbors? Do they not come to you for advice and sympathy on all occasions? Is there a birth or a death or a wedding in the parish that you don't know all about before it happens?"

"It used to be so," she said, half amused, half sadly; "and if not now, perhaps it is my fault. But tell me whom you mean to invite. I should like to hear all about the entertainment, though I do not go. It is such an important event in Ditchley, a dinner-party at the Rectory, and to a young bride."

So she took pencil and paper, and made out a list of names, he dictating them—for the old man seemed quite pleased with his little outburst of hospitality—until they came to one at which Mrs. Scanlan stopped.

"Dr. and Mrs. Waters. No; that will be useless. She—she does not go out."

"Bless my soul, I had forgotten. How stupid of me!" cried Mr. Oldham; and then he too stopped, and his keen, inquisitive eyes sought Josephine's. But she had dropped them, and was making idle marks upon the paper, to hide a certain awkwardness. They had both evidently hit upon a subject in which each was uncertain how much the other knew.

"I ought not to have forgotten. My good old friend! Of course, I must ask him; and—his wife."

"You had better ask him without his wife," said Josephine, quietly, with her eyes still cast down. "If you ask her, and she hears of it, she is sure to want to come; and—she ought not to come."

"I suppose not. Poor Mrs. Waters! she is—ahem!—a great invalid."

Mrs. Scanlan was silent.

"I thought," said the rector, clearing his throat, "that my poor old friend and I had arranged all between us, so that nobody in Ditchley was any the wiser for this—this sad affair. I hate gossip, and gossip about such a painful thing would be hard to bear. Waters and I took every precaution, and his house is a large house, and quite out of the town; one would have thought a person could be—ill—there without the whole town's knowing."

"I am not aware that the town does know; I hardly see how it can," said Josephine, gently, for she saw how troubled the rector was. She well knew why, only she had not expected so much warm feeling in the cold-mannered, lonely old man, who was supposed to care for nobody but himself.

"But you know?" said he, anxiously. "Yes, from your face now I am sure of it. Tell me frankly, how much do you know?"

"Everything, I believe. I found it out by accident."

"How long since?"

"Six months ago."

"And you have never told—not a creature? And in the many times that I have spoken to you about the Waters family, you have never once betrayed that you knew any thing? Well, you are a wonderful woman—the only woman I ever knew who could hold her tongue."

"Am I?" said Josephine, smiling, half sadly, for she had had a few sharp lessons—conjugal and domestic—before arriving at that height of perfection.

Still anxious, Mr. Oldham begged she would tell him exactly what she knew, and there came out one of those terrible domestic tragedies, which people always hide if they can, and which had hitherto been successfully hidden, even from gossiping Ditchley. Dr. Waters's wife, of whom he was very fond, had suddenly gone mad, and tried to destroy both him and herself. The fit over without harm, she had partially recovered, but still required to be kept in strict seclusion as a "great invalid," appear-



A REMARKABLE WOMAN.

ing little outside her own house, and then only with her so-called "nurse"—in reality her keeper. This woman, once meeting Mrs. Scanlan when she had lost her mistress on the common, and was frantically searching for her, had betrayed the whole sad truth, imploring her to keep the secret, which she did faithfully.

"Even from your husband?" inquired, rather pointedly, Mr. Oldham.

"Yes. It did not affect him, nor would he have taken much interest in the matter," she answered, half apologetically. She could not say the other fact—that he would have told it the next day, quite unwittingly, to every body in Ditchley. "Besides, I had promised, and a promise ought to be kept implicitly."

"Certainly, my dear Madame, certainly!"

The old man sat rubbing his hands, and looking at her with great admiration. "A remarkable woman—the most remarkable woman I ever knew!" Then, as a knock came to the door, "There is Scanlan coming home to his tea, and I must go to my dinner. I will just shake hands with him, and depart. Adieu, Madame. Au revoir."

He bowed over her hand—his quaint, formal little bow—and disappeared.

But the next day Mrs. Scanlan received by coach, from the largest linen-draper's shop in the county town, a magnificent silk dress, richer than any thing ever seen in Ditchley. With it was an envelope, addressed to herself, containing these lines, written in French, and in the delicate, precise hand which was at once

recognizable: "From an old man, in token of his respect for a lady who can both keep a promise and hold her tongue about it."

Alas! by this time there was no need for Mrs. Scanlan to hold her tongue any longer. Mrs. Waters had had another "attack," during which she had gone—Ditchley never quite knew how—to that world where she would wake up in her right mind, and heaven would be as tender over her as her dearly-loved and loving husband was, to the last, in this.

There was no dinner-party at which to show off the beautiful new gown; the rector was too shocked and sad to give any. But Lady Emma came, and Mrs. Scanlan saw her, greatly to Mr. Scanlan's delight. Nay, the bride praised so warmly his Josephine that he admired her himself more than ever, for at least ten days, and took great interest in the handsome appearance she would make in her new silk dress. But Mrs. Scanlan herself had little pleasure in it, and, though she thanked the rector for it, and accepted it kindly—as, indeed, the kindness of the gift deserved—she laid it by in a drawer, almost as sadly as if it had been a mourning weed.

CHAPTER IV.

On Josephine Scanlan's lovely face a slight shadow was now deepening every year and with every child—for a child came almost every year. Fortunately—or at least so said the neighbors—

but did the mother?—fortunately, not all were living; but ere ten years were past Wren's Nest contained six little nestlings, growing up from babies into big boys and girls—César, Adrienne, Louis, Gabrielle, Martin, Catherine. Josephine had insisted on this latter name, in remembrance of her gentle, kindly, vulgar, good old mother-in-law, now long gone to her rest. Curiously enough, except Adrienne, who was the plain one of the family, but, as if by tender compensation, the sweetest little soul among them all, the whole of the children were De Bougainvilles—handsome, well-grown, graceful; a young tribe that any mother might be proud of. And she was very proud of them, and very happy in them, at times—yet still the shadow in her face grew and grew.

There is a portrait of her, taken about this time, I believe, by a wandering artist who had settled for the summer at Ditchley, and with whom the curate struck up one of his sudden friendships. Mr. Summerhayes, attracted by Mrs. Scanlan's beauty, requested permission to paint her, and afterward, out of politeness, painted, as a companion picture, her husband likewise.

The two heads are very characteristic. The one is full of a lovely gravity, nay, something more, for the expression is anxious even to severity; in the other is that careless *insouciance* which may be charming in itself, but which has the result of creating in other people its very opposite. That painful earnestness about great things and small, that unnatural and exaggerated “taking thought for the morrow,” which sometimes grows to be an actual misfortune, so as to make the misery of to-day—might never have come to Josephine, if her Edward had been blessed with a little more of these qualities. There is no need to do more than look at the two portraits, speaking so plainly through the silence of years, in order to detect at once the secret of their married life; how that the burden which the man shirked and shrank from the woman had to take up and bear. Josephine Scanlan did this, and did it to the end.

Without murmuring either, except, perhaps, just at the first. There might have been a season when, like most young wives and many-childed mothers, she had expected to be cherished and taken care of; to be protected as well as loved; helped as well as admired; but that time had passed by. Not without a struggle; still it did pass, and she accepted her destiny; accepted it as a fact; nay, more, as a natural necessity. She was young and strong; physically, quite as strong as her husband, delicate though her appearance was; morally, no person who was in their company for an hour could have doubted the relative calibre of Mr. and Mrs. Scanlan. A man is not necessarily “a man,” in the true spiritual sense, because he happens to wear coat and trowsers; nor is a woman always of the “weaker sex” because she has a soft voice, a quiet manner, a feeble and

feminine frame. I have seen many and many a couple in which, without any great external show of the thing, Nature seemed to have adapted herself to circumstances, and “turned the tables” in a most wonderful way between husbands and wives, giving to the one where-withal to supply the other's lack; and that so gradually, so imperceptibly, that they themselves scarcely recognized how completely they had changed places—the man becoming the woman, and the woman the man. A sad sight, theoretically: but, practically, often not so sad as it seems.

Possibly Mrs. Scanlan grew to be dimly conscious of one fact as concerned herself and her husband—that, whether or not she was the cleverer, he being always considered such a brilliant and talented young man—she was certainly the stronger, wiser, more sensible of the two. But at any rate she experienced its results, and accepted them, and the additional duties they involved, with a great, silent courage, such as the urgency of the case demanded. For she was a mother, and mothers must never know either despondency or fear.

If she began to look anxious and care-worn, so care-worn that it spoiled her beauty and made her husband gradually become indifferent to whatever sort of dress she wore, it was no wonder. The mere thought of her children was enough to weigh her down night and day; to say nothing of the incessant physical weariness of taking care of so many little folk, bright, loving, mischievous monkeys, who had all the activity of healthy, country-bred children, placed under the very simplest discipline, and a discipline that was, of necessity, wholly maternal; for the father took less and less notice of them every day.

She did not spoil them, I think—at least Bridget protested she never did; that she always kept a wholesome authority over them, and never indulged them in any way. Poor little souls! there was small opportunity for indulgence in their primitive, all but penurious life; but she was obliged to see them growing up around her almost as wild as young colts; deprived of every advantage which good food, good clothes, good society, and, above all, good education, give to young people; that unconscious influence of outward things, which affects children, even at that early age, far more than we suspect.

Their mother saw all this; knew all that they lacked—which she would have given any thing to provide them with. Yet here she was, bound hand and foot with the iron bands of poverty; able to do almost nothing for them, except love them. She did that. God only knows how a mother's heart goes out to her children—with a perfect torrent of passionate devotedness—when in its other channel, deepest and holiest of all, the natural stream is slowly drying up; or becoming, as Wordsworth mournfully sings of it, no longer a living fountain, but

“A comfortless and hidden well.”

I have no right to take any thing for granted—but straws show which way the wind blows—and I find in Mrs. Scanlan's journal, hidden under its safe French, many a sentence such as this, which betrays a good deal more than appears on the surface:

"My poor Adrienne is ailing, which casts a gloom over the whole house, and makes me busier than ever; for she has grown to be such a help to her mother, dear child! I wish I could take her to the sea, if only for a week; but how could I leave home—leave papa all to himself? Things would be sure to go wrong if I did; and besides, Edward would be so very uncomfortable. Nor should I like to propose it; for it would cost a deal of money—nearly as much as that projected journey of his to London with Mr. Summerhayes, against which I have set my face so firmly, telling him he must give it up; we could not possibly afford it.

"Nor can we. Even with all the lightening of my housekeeping through Mr. Oldham's kindness" (the rector had long ago given the children what he called "a quarter of a cow," namely, a can of new milk daily, with eggs and butter, fruit and vegetables in unlimited supply, from his own farm and garden)—"even with all this I shall scarcely succeed in making ends meet this Christmas; and if we have any extraneous expenses out of the house we shall not be able to pay our Christmas bills. And oh! what a terrible thing that would be—sorer than any thing which has yet happened to us!"

Sore things had happened them occasionally; but she rarely noted them down except by implication. This, perhaps, was one of them:

"César, mon petit César, wearies me to let him learn drawing of Mr. Summerhayes. Not that he has any particular talent for it, but it amuses him, and he likes it better than his book. And it takes him away from home—from our poor little house—going sketching about the country with papa and Mr. Summerhayes. Not that they do much work; indeed, I think Mr. Summerhayes has little need to work—he is not a 'poor' artist apparently; but it is a lively, wandering, pleasant life, such as most men take to eagerly. I wish Edward did not take to it quite so much; it does no good, and it is very expensive. I myself have no great faith, nor a very warm interest in this Mr. Summerhayes. Still, he is a pleasant young fellow enough: my husband likes him, and so do my children, especially my two eldest. Poor little Adrienne, who at eleven years old is twice as clever as her brother in her drawing as in other things, though she is such a tiny dot of a child—Adrienne, I see, quite adores Mr. Summerhayes."

"My" children—alas! a deep meaning lies under that small word, that unimpressive, apparently unimportant "my."

There came a period in Mrs. Scanlan's marriage—as it does in many a marriage which looks comfortable enough to the world and jogs on fairly to the last—when the wife was gradu-

ally becoming absorbed in the mother.—Now a voice at my elbow, and one I can not choose but listen to, knowing it is often both wiser and tenderer than my own, whispers that this is a wrong thing, a wicked thing—that any woman who deliberately prefers her children to her husband is unworthy the name of wife. To which I reply that no man worthy the name of husband need ever fear that his wife *will* love him less than she loves her children—the thing is unnatural, improbable, impossible. But all the shams in the world will not exalt an unworthy husband into a position which, even if he had it, he could not keep. He will find his level, and the children will find theirs, in the heart which is never likely to be very false to either."

But of that mysterious thing, love, it is as true as it is of most other things—what people win they must earn. When Josephine de Bougainville married Edward Scanlan she was a mere girl, little beyond a child, and he a grown man—at least he considered himself as such. When she developed into the woman that she was, a creature embodying more than any one I ever knew Wordsworth's picture of

"A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command,"

he remaining still what he was, an average young man, no better than most young men and inferior to many—the difference between the two showed fearfully plain. Less in their mental than in their moral stature: Edward Scanlan was a very clever fellow in his way; brilliant with all Hibernian brilliancy, and the Hibernian aptitude of putting every talent well forward, so that, like the shops in the Rue de Rivoli and the Palais Royal—all the jewelry was in the windows. Of mere brains he had quite as much as she; or even, if he had not it would have mattered little. Many a clever woman loves passionately a not particularly clever man, when she sees in his nature something which is different from and nobler than her own. And seeing this she can always place herself, quite naturally, in the inferior attitude, which to all women and wives is at once so delicious and so indispensable.

But to wake up from that love-dream and find that its object is quite another sort of person from what he was fondly imagined to be; that her affection toward him must, if it is to continue at all, entirely change its character, and become not a loving up but a loving down—an excusing of weaknesses, a covering over of faults, perhaps a deliberate pardoning of sins—this must be, to any wife, a most awful blow. Yet it has happened, hundreds of times; and women have survived it, even as they survive love-disappointments, and losses by death, and other agonizing sorrows, by which Heaven teaches us poor mortals that here is not our rest; and that, deeper than any thing stock phraseology can teach, comes back and back upon us the lesson of life—to lay up our treasure not overmuch in this world, but in that

world "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

The blow falls, but, happily, it seldom falls suddenly. And being so utterly irremediable, women, especially those who have children, become reconciled to it; make the best of it; take it as other women have done before them, and pass gradually out of its first blinding darkness into that twilight stage of much-enduring matrimony, which seems to be the lot of so many, and with which so many are apparently quite content. Nevertheless, to those happy wives who, thank God! know what it is to live daily and hourly in the full daylight of satisfied love, such a region appears only a better sort of Hades, peopled with the flitting ghosts of departed joys.

Into that silent valley of endless shade the young matron, Josephine Scanlan, had slowly passed.

I do not allege that her husband was unkind to her: personal unkindness was not in his nature; he was far too easy and good-tempered for that. It would almost have been better if he had been a little unkind sometimes. Many a bad-tempered man is not essentially a bad man, and a woman like Josephine could have borne patiently some small ill-usage, had it come from a husband whom in other things she could deeply respect. I have heard her say sometimes, "that common men break their wives' heads, and gentlemen their hearts: and the former was a less heinous crime than the latter." Be that as it may, I think she herself would have borne any personal wrong easier than to sit still and endure the maddening sight of watching her youth's idol slowly crumble down into the very commonest of clay.

It may be urged, first, why did she set him up as an idol, when he was but an ordinary man? Well, that may have been a very silly thing, yet do not all women do it? And would their love be much worth having if they did not do it?—Secondly, finding him to be what he was, why did she not try to improve him?

It is a melancholy fact that some men can not be improved. A strong nature, warped to evil, may be gradually bent back again to good; but over a weak nature no person has any power; there is nothing to catch hold of; it is like throwing out the ship's sheet-anchor into shifting sands. Edward Scanlan's higher impulses were as little permanent as his lower ones. "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel," had been his curse through life; though—so bright and sweet are the self-delusions of youth—it was not for some years that his wife discovered it.

And, mercifully, Ditchley did not discover it at all, at least not for a long time. It was one of those failings which do not show outside. He was still the most interesting of men and of clergymen; played first fiddle in all societies; and if he did hang up that invaluable instrument at his own door, why, nobody was

any the wiser: his wife never told. Perhaps, indeed, it was rather a comfort to her to have the fiddling silenced within the house—it would have been such a cruel contrast to the struggle that went on there: the continual battle with toil, poverty, and grinding care.

The one bit of sunshine at Wren's Nest was undoubtedly the children. Rough as they were, they were very good children, better than many rich men's offspring in their self-denial, self-dependence, and uncomplaining gayety amidst all deprivations, which they, however, having never known any thing better, did not much feel. Here, too, the Irish light-heartedness of their faithful Bridget stood them in good stead; and their mother's French adaptability taught them to make the best of things. The little girls began to do house-work, sew, and mind the baby; the little boys to garden and help their mother in all sorts of domestic ways; and this at an age when most children are still in a state of nursery helplessness, or worse. The incessant activity of little people, which in well-to-do households finds no outlet but mischievousness, here was always led into a useful channel, and so did good instead of harm. Work became their play, and to "help mother" their favorite amusement. She has many an entry in her diary concerning them, such as this:

"This morning, Adrienne, standing on a stool at my ironing-table, began to iron pocket-handkerchiefs, and really, for her first attempt, did it quite beautiful. She was so proud; she means to do it every week now, and I mean to let her, provided it does not injure her poor back, which not yet is as strong as it should be. I shall not, however, allow her to carry the next baby." Alas! the "next" baby.

Or this:

"César and Louis went up to the Rectory all by themselves, to fetch a great bundle of young cauliflowers, which my children are so fond of, saying, when I cook them *à la Française*, meat at dinner is quite unnecessary. They planted them all by themselves, too. Papa said he would show them how, but he happened to be out. He takes very little interest in the garden; but my two boys are born gardeners, and love every inch of the ground, and every living thing upon it. I wish they may make it produce more than it does, and then we need not accept so much from the Rectory. It is always a bad thing to be too much dependent upon even the kindest of neighbors; and so I often say to the children, telling them they must learn to shift for themselves—as assuredly they will have to do—and try and be as independent as possible.

"I had to tell them yesterday that they must try and do without sugar to their tea—grocery is so very dear now. They pulled a wry face or two at the first cup, but afterward they did not complain at all, saying 'that what mother did, surely they could do.' My children are such exceedingly good children."

So it came to pass that finding, young as they



HELPING MOTHER.

were, she could actually respect and trust them more than she could their father, she gradually loved them best. A mournful truth; but does any mother wonder at it? I, for one, do not.

No household is very dreary so long as it has children in it—good children, and merry with all the mirth of youth. The little Scanlans must have had their fill of mirth; their happiness made their mother happy also, in a sort of reflected way. She was still young enough to become a child with them, to share in all their holiday frolics, their primrose gatherings, hay-makings, nuttings, skatings, and slidings. All the year round there was something doing; in the endless variety which country children enjoy. But from these festivals the father was usually absent. They were “not in his line,” he said; and when he did go, he enjoyed himself so little that the rest of the young party found, in plain language, “his room was better than his company.” That grand and lovely sight—I use advisedly these strong adjectives—of a father taking a day’s pleasure with all his children round him; stooping from his large worldly pursuits to their small, unworldly ones; forgetting himself in the delight of making them

happy—with a happiness which they will remember long after he is laid in dust—this sight was never seen at Ditchley, so far as concerned the Scanlan family. If Ditchley ever noticed the fact, reasons for it were never lacking. Poor Mr. Scanlan’s parish duties were so very heavy;—it was quite sad to think how little he saw of his family—how continually he was obliged to be away from home.

That was true; only, strange to say, nobody at home seemed much to miss his absence. Perhaps, unconsciously, the little folks betrayed this; and, as they grew up—being remarkably simple and straightforward children—found it difficult not to let their father see that they had discovered certain weak points in his character—inaccuracies and exaggerations of speech, selfishnesses and injustices of action—which discovery could hardly have been altogether pleasant to Mr. Scanlan. He gradually ceased to look oftener than he could help into César’s honest eyes, which sometimes expressed such intense astonishment, to say the least of it, at the father’s words and ways; and he gave up petting little Adrienne, who sometimes, when he did something that “grieved mother,” fol-

lowed him about the house with mute looks of such gentle reproach that he could not stand them. His love of approbation was so strong that he could not bear to be disapproved of, even by a child; but he did not try to amend matters and win approval; he only got vexed, and took the usual remedy of an uneasy conscience—he ran away.

Alas for his wife, the woman who had to excuse him not only to herself but to these others—the quick-sighted little people, whose feelings were so fresh and clear—what must her difficulties have been? And when, all excuses failing before her stern sense of absolute right—the justice without which mercy is a miserable weakness or a cowardly sham, the duty toward God, which is beyond all obedience to man—she had, as her sole resource, to maintain a dead silence toward her children with regard to their father—how terrible her trial!

The only comfort was, that nobody knew it. Ditchley pitied the curate's wife for many things: because she had such narrow means and such a large family; because, being such a charming, elegant, and accomplished woman, she was only a curate's wife, doomed to have her light hidden under a bushel all her days. But it never thought of pitying her for the one only thing for which she would have pitied herself—the blank in her heart where an idol should have been—the sad silence there instead of singing—the dull patience and forbearance which had taken the place of joy and love.

No wonder that her beauty began to fade, that her cheerfulness declined, or was only prominent in her intercourse with children—her own and other people's. Grown-up people she rather avoided; her neighbors, with whom she had been so popular once, said among themselves that Mrs. Scanlan was not quite so pleasant as she used to be; was overridden by domestic cares, and growing rather unsocial, hard, and cold. Nay, some of them sympathized with her husband in having so little of a companion in his wife, and quite understood how it was he went out so much, and alone; one or two married ladies, who were very well off and had no children, blamed her openly for this; and said it was "all her fault if Mr. Scanlan went too much into society."

Mrs. Scanlan heard it, of course. Birds of the air always carry such a matter. She heard, and set her lips together in that stern hard line which was becoming natural to them—but she said not a word. She never defended herself at all, either then or afterward. So, by degrees, the kindest of the Ditchley ladies left her to herself, to carry out her lonely life at Wren's Nest, which was a good mile away from the town and its prying gossip. Often she passed days and weeks without receiving a single visitor, and then the visiting was confined to an exchange of calls, at long intervals, kept up, Ditchley owned, for civility's sake, and chiefly out of respect to Mr. Scanlan. He was popular enough; not run after quite as much as at

first, perhaps, yet still very well liked in the neighborhood, and always welcome in any society. But it was such exceedingly up-hill work keeping up acquaintance with Mrs. Scanlan.

One person, however, maintained toward her a firm fidelity, and that was the rector. Not that he showed it in any strongly demonstrative way—he was by no means a demonstrative man—but he always spoke of her in the highest terms, as "a first-rate woman," and specially "a woman who could hold her tongue." And though, from something she let fall in thanking him for her silk dress, he delicately forbore making her any more personal presents, his thoughtful kindness with regard to the children was continual.

He did not raise his curate's salary, in spite of many a broad hint from that gentleman; but he helped the household in many a quiet way, often obvious to no one but the mistress of it—and to Bridget, who had a very great respect for Mr. Oldham—at least so far as was consistent with her evident and outspoken disapprobation of men as a race, and especially as clergymen.

"I'd like to put my missis in the pulpit," said this excellent woman, who lived before the great question of women's rights was broached. "I wonder what she'd say? Any how, she'd say it better than most men; and she'd act up to it too, which isn't always the way with your parsons. Their religion's in their head and in their mouths; I'd like to see it a bit plainer in their lives."

This may show that the curate's was not exactly a "religious" family. They kept up all the forms of piety; had prayers twice a day, and so on; the Bible, lying always open on Mr. Scanlan's desk, and tossing about in his coat-pockets, was read aloud enough, especially the Epistles, for all the household to know it by heart. But Bridget once told me her mistress had confessed that, for years, to hear certain portions of the Bible read actually turned her sick, until she had laid it aside long enough to come to it with a fresh and understanding soul, free from all the painful associations of the past.

And so the Scanlan household struggled on, living "from hand to mouth"—with often a wide space between the hand and the mouth; while many a time it needed all Josephine's vigilance to take care that even the hand which led to the mouth—those poor hungry mouths of her dear children!—should be strictly an honest hand. For that creed of the De Bougainvilles, "*Noblesse oblige*," which held that a gentleman may starve, but he must neither beg nor borrow—this creed was not the creed of the Scanlan family. It was Mrs. Scanlan's hardest trial to keep sternly before her children's eyes that code of honor which her husband talked about, but neither practiced nor believed in. And when at last the climax came—when their "difficulties" increased so much that it was obvious the year's income could not possibly meet the year's expenses—then she recognized fully what

a death-blow it is to all conjugal peace and domestic union when the husband holds one standard of right and the wife another; or, rather, when it is the wife only who has any fixed standard of right at all.

As usual, the collapse came suddenly—that is, the discovery of it; for Mr. Scanlan would go on for days and weeks playing on the brink of a precipice rather than acknowledge it was a precipice, or speak of it as such. He disliked even to open his lips on what he called “unpleasant subjects.” He left all these to his wife. “Do you manage it, my dear,” he would say; “you manage so beautifully.” The little flattery only now awoke in her a passing smile, but she managed the troubles for all that.

At length a day came when she could not manage them any longer; when she was obliged to insist upon her husband’s speaking out his mind to her upon the critical position of their affairs.

Very much astonished was poor Mr. Scanlan! Surely this pressure must be all a mistake, springing from his wife’s overweening anxiety about money-matters; an anxiety common to all mothers, he thought.

“It is not a mistake,” said she, calmly, though with a hot cheek. “See there!”

And she laid before him, written out, in plain black and white, all the sums they owed, and all the money they had in hand to meet them.—Alas! it was a heavy deficit.

Mr. Scanlan took up the paper carelessly. “How neatly you have set it all down, and what capital arithmetic! Really, Josephine, you ought to apply for a situation as clerk and book-keeper somewhere.”

“I wish I could!” said she, beneath her breath; but her husband either did not or would not hear. Still he looked a little vexed.

“You should have told me this before, my dear!”

“I have told you, but you said it did not matter, and that I was not to trouble you with it. Nor would I have done so, till the last extremity.”

“I can’t conceive what you mean by the last extremity. And how has it all come about? It must be your fault, for you manage every thing and spend every thing.”

“Not quite,” said she, and put before him a second list of figures, in two lines, headed severally “House expenses” and “Papa’s expenses.” It was remarkable how equal the sum total of each was; and, naturally, this fact made papa very angry. He burst out into some very bitter words, which his wife received in stolid silence.

I do not here praise Josephine Scanlan; I think she must have gradually got into a hard way of saying and doing things, which, no doubt, was very aggravating to the impulsive Irish nature of her husband. He was fond of her still, in his sort of selfish way, and he liked to have her love and her approbation. He would have been much better pleased, no doubt, had she

put her arms about his neck with “Never mind, dearest Edward!” and passed the whole thing over, instead of standing in front of him thus—the embodiment of moral right—a sort of domestic Themis, pointing with one hand to those terrible lines of figures, and pressing the other tightly upon her heart, the agitated beating of which he did not know. But she stood quite still, betraying no weakness. The thing had to be done, and she did it, in what seemed to her the best and only way. There might have been another, a gentler way: but I do not know. Alas! that one unfailing strength of a wife, the power of appeal to her husband’s conscience, certain that, even if he has erred a little, his sense of duty will soon right itself; this engine of righteous power was wanting to poor Mrs. Scanlan. She had tried it so often and found it fail, that now she never tried it any more.

She stood in dead silence, waiting until his torrent of words had expended itself; then she said:

“Now, without more talking, we had better see what is best to be done.”

“Done? Why, what can we do? Where was the use of your coming to me about all this? I’m not Midas; I can’t turn pebbles into pounds!” And even in the midst of his annoyance Mr. Scanlan smiled at his own apt illustration.

His wife might have replied that to throw away pounds like pebbles was more in his line, but she checked the sharp answer, and made none at all.

“I can not imagine what is to be done,” he continued. “If we had any relatives, any friends, to whom I could have applied—”

“We have none, happily.”

“Why do you say happily? But I know your crotchets on this head. You are totally mistaken, Josephine. Friends ought to help one another. Does not Scripture itself say, ‘Give to him that asketh, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.’”

“But Scripture does not say, ‘Go a borrowing, knowing all the while that you never can pay.’”

“Nonsense! We should pay in course of time.”

“We might, but I should be sorry to risk the experiment. No; fortunately for them and us, we have no friends.”

She spoke in such a measured, impassive voice that Mr. Scanlan looked at her, uncertain whether she were in jest or earnest, pleased or vexed.

“You are an odd kind of woman, Josephine; much more so than you used to be. I can’t understand you at all. But come, since my idea is scouted, what plan do you propose? I leave it all to you, for I am sick of the whole matter.” And he threw himself on the sofa with a weary and much injured air.

She sat down by him, and suggested a very simple scheme—selling some of her jewelry,

which was valuable, and almost useless to her now. But she had reckoned without her host. The sacrifice which to Mrs. Scanlan had seemed trifling, to Mr. Scanlan appeared quite dreadful.

"What! part with these lovely emeralds and diamonds, which have been so much admired, and which make you look well-dressed, however careless you are in other ways? And sell them in Ditchley, that some neighbor may parade them before your very face, and proclaim to all the world how poor we are? Intolerable! I will never allow it; you must not think of such a thing."

But finding she still did think of it, he took another tack, and appealed to her feelings.

"I wonder at you! To sell my gifts, and my poor father's and mother's—the pretty things you used to look so sweet in when we were first married! Josephine, you must have the heart of a stone!"

"Have I?" cried she. "I almost wish I had." And as her husband put his arm round her she burst into tears; upon which he began to caress and coax her, and she to excuse him: thinking, after all, it was loving of him to wish not to part with these mementoes of old days. "Oh, Edward!" she said, leaning her head against his shoulder, "we used to be so fond of one another."

"Used to be? I hope we are still. You are a very good wife to me, and I am sure I try to be a good husband to you. We should never have these differences at all, if you would only mind what I say, and not hold to your own opinion so firmly. Remember, the husband is head of the wife, and she must obey him."

Here Edward Scanlan assumed rather a lordly air, which he usually did when his Josephine was particularly humble. Like most men of his character, he resembled that celebrated nettle which, if you "tenderly touch it—"

"stings you for your pains; But be like a man of mettle and it soft as silk remains."

"It is no use, my dear," continued he; "you must give in to me a little more. The root of all our miseries is our being so poor, which we always shall be while we stick in the mud of Ditchley—this wretched country town, where I am not half appreciated. As I have so often said, we must remove to London."

Mrs. Scanlan drew back from him, turning so white that he was frightened.

"My dear, you are ill. Have a glass of wine. Bridget! Here, Bridget!"

"Don't call her. I need it not. And, besides, there is no wine in the house."

"Then there ought to be," returned Mr. Scanlan, angrily: for this too was a sore subject. He had been brought up in the old-fashioned school of considering stimulants a necessity. Old Mr. Scanlan used to imbibe his bottle of port a day, and young Mr. Scanlan his three or four glasses; which habit, Josephine, accustomed to her father's French abstinence, had greatly disliked, and succeeded in breaking him off from just in time, before

their changed circumstances required him to do so as a point of economy. He did it cheerfully enough, for he was no drunkard; still he sometimes went back to the old leaven, enjoyed and envied the wine at other men's tables, and grumbled sorely at the want of it at his own.

"I tell you what, Josephine, I won't stand this miserable penury any longer. That a man like me should be hidden in this hole of a place, deprived of every comfort of life, and hindered from taking his rightful position in the world, is a very great shame. It must be somebody's fault or other."

"Whose?" At the flash of her eyes his own fell.

"Not yours, my dear; I never meant to accuse you of it. Nor the children's—though it is an uncomfortable fact that a man with a family is much more hampered, and kept back in the world, than a man who has none. Still, they can't help it, poor little things! But I am sure it would be a great deal better for them, and even for you, if we had a wider sphere. We must go and live in London."

But he said "must" very doubtfully, being aware of his wife's mind on the subject.

This bone of contention had been thrown between the husband and wife by Mr. Summerhayes, the artist. He had persuaded Edward Scanlan, who was easily enough persuaded by any body, that his great talents for preaching were entirely wasted in the provinces; that if he came to the metropolis, and rented a proprietary chapel, crowds would flock to hear him: Irish eloquence was so highly appreciated. He would soon become as popular in London as he had been in Dublin, and derive a large income from his pew-rents, besides being in a much more independent position as preacher in a licensed Church of England chapel than as curate of a country parish. At the time, Josephine had been able to reason the scheme out of his head, showing him that the whole thing was a matter of chance, built upon premises which probably did not exist, and running certain risks for very uncertain benefits. Her arguments were so strong, that, with his usual habit of agreeing with the last speaker, her husband had agreed with her—at first: still he went back and back upon the project: and whenever he was restless, or sick, or dissatisfied, brought it up again—using all the old complainings, and old inducements, just as if she had never set them aside; proving, with that clear common-sense of hers, that such a project was worse than imprudent—all but insane. Still, by this time she had ceased to argue; she simply held her peace—and her own opinion.

"We must *not* go to London, Edward. It would be utter ruin to both me, the children, and yourself."

"Ay, there it is," returned he, bitterly; "'me' first, the children second, your husband last—always last."

This form of her speech had been purely accidental, and if it sprung from an underlying

truth, that truth was unrecognized by herself. So, naturally, her whole soul sprang up indignant at her husband's injustice.

"I do not think of myself first; that is not my way—not any mother's way. My whole life is spent for you and the children, and you know it. I am right in what I say. And I will not have my poor lambs carried away from here, where at least we have bread to eat, and one or two people who care for us, and taken up to London to starve. *I will not*, Edward."

She spoke so loudly that Adrienne put her little anxious face in at the parlor door, asking "if mother called?" Then the mother came to her right senses at once.

"No, my darling," she whispered, putting the child out, and shutting the door after her. "Run away; papa and I are busy talking."

Then she turned, saying gently, "Husband, I beg your pardon."

"You have need," said he, grimly. But he was not of a grim nature, and when she further made concessions, he soon came round.

"Nevertheless," she said, when they were quite reconciled, "I hold to my point. I can not consent to this scheme of yours, or rather of Mr. Summerhayes's."

"You are very unjust—you always were—to my friend Summerhayes. He is a capital fellow, worth any number of the stupid folk of Ditchley—associations quite unfitted for a man like me. But if you will have me thrown away—bury your husband all his life down here, like a diamond in a dunghill—why, take your way! Only you must also take the consequences."

"I will!" she said. And then her heart smote her once more. She had been so furious, Edward so good-tempered, and he had yielded to her so completely, that her generous nature recoiled from accepting what seemed such a sacrifice from him to her. She could not have done it, were there only herself to think of. But—those six children! And a vision rose up before her of London as she had seen it, only once in her life—passing through from Ireland to Ditchley;—ghastly London, where, in the midst of splendor, people can so easily die of want. As, supposing her husband were unsuccessful, her poor little children might die. No, she could not consent. Besides, what use would it be if she did? They had no money whatsoever, not even enough to pay the expenses of the journey.

Still, remorse for her hardness toward him made her listen patiently to another scheme of Mr. Scanlan's, which many a time he had tried vainly to persuade her to; namely, asking Mr. Oldham for an increase of salary.

"I quite deserve it," said the curate. "I do all the work, and he has all the pay. My income is hundreds to his thousands. I wonder, by-the-way, how large his income is, and who will drop in for it? His property is considerable; but he is as stingy as all rich men are. He would drive a bargain and stick to it to the very last."

"I see no harm in sticking to a bargain, if it is not an unfair one," said Josephine, smiling; "nor do I think Mr. Oldham so very stingy. Think how kind he is to the children!"

"The children, pooh! Has he ever been kind to me? Has he ever fairly appreciated my abilities, and the sacrifice I make in continuing to be his curate, when I might so easily— But I won't vex you, my dear; I'll never refer to that subject again."

Nevertheless he did; being one of those people who can not take "No" for an answer, or believe that "Yes" implies a decision; but are always trusting to the chance of other people being as weak and undecided as themselves. At last, partly in a kind of despair, and partly because she really saw some justice in the thing, Mrs. Scanlan consented that the rector should be appealed to for more salary.

But who should "bell the cat?"—a rather unpleasant business.

"I think you would do it best, my dear; women are cleverer at these things than men, and you are such an extraordinarily clever woman."

Josephine smiled at the "blarney," which she was not quite deaf to yet; seeing it was the blarney of affection. And her husband did feel great affection for her at that minute. She had saved him from a difficulty; she had consented to what he wanted, and he was really grateful to her, with that shallow gratitude for small mercies and deep sensibility to temporary reliefs which formed part of his *insouciant* disposition.

And then she paused to think the matter over. It was not her business certainly, but her husband's; still, as he said, she would probably manage it best. Mr. Oldham was rather difficult to deal with; Edward might vex him and spoil all. At any rate, he disliked the burden of doing it; and most of his burdens had gradually fallen upon her, till her delicate shoulders had grown hardened to the weight. How many another woman has been driven to the same lot, and then blamed for tacitly accepting it; ridiculed as masculine, strong-minded—the "gray mare," which is called contemptuously the "better horse!" And why? Because she is the better horse.

(While I say this a firm arm holds me, and a tender voice suggests that I am talking nonsense. But I can not be calmly judicial on this head. I know, and he who holds me knows too, that it is the truth I speak; forced on me by the remembrance of the sad life of my dear Lady de Bougainville.)

"Come, my darling," said Edward Scanlan, caressingly. "Please go to the Rectory and do this difficult business. You will do it so beautifully—a thousand times better than I. For you have a way of doing and saying any thing so as to offend nobody. Never was there a truer proverb: 'One man may steal a sheep, while another mayn't look over the hedge.'"

"And so you want me to go and steal your

sheep for you?" said Josephine, laughing, and clinging to her husband fondly, in that vain hoping against hope which had so often beguiled her—that if he were a richer he would be both a happier and a better man; and that, whether or no, her continuing to love him would help him to become all she wished him to be.

"Well, I will try to get you out of this difficulty, and, perhaps, things may be easier for the future. I will go and speak to Mr. Oldham to-morrow."

CHAPTER V.

THAT to-morrow, of which Josephine Scanlan spoke so calmly, turned out to be the crisis of her life.

To make up her mind to this visit to the Rectory cost some pain. It was like assuming her husband's duty; doing for him what he was too weak to do for himself; and, though many a woman is compelled to do this, still it is only a mean sort of woman who enjoys the doing of it, or likes being made *perforce* a heroine because her husband is a coward.

Ay, that was the key-note of Edward Scanlan's nature. He was a moral coward. Physically, perhaps, he had the bravery of most Irishmen; would have faced the cannon's mouth; indeed, it was always his regret that he had not been a soldier instead of a clergyman. But to say No to an evil or unworthy request; to enter an elegant drawing-room in a shabby coat; in short, to do any thing awkward, unpleasant, or painful, was to him quite impossible—as impossible as it would have been to his wife to go away and leave it undone.

She knew this well; it had been forced upon her through years of bitter experience, and, therefore, she nerved herself to undergo her double humiliation: that of asking a favor which might not be granted, and of reading in the rector's shrewd eyes, though he might be too courteous to say it, the knowledge that her husband, and not she, was the person who ought to have come and asked it. She knew, too, that all sorts of common-sense questions might be put to her. Why could they not make ends meet?—other people did who were no better off than they, and had as many children. Perhaps, too, even Mr. Oldham would side with the opinions of the other two men—Mr. Scanlan and Mr. Summerhayes—against her—only a woman! and recommend that they should try to better themselves by seeking their fortune in London.

Seeking one's fortune! A bright, bold, happy thing to do—for a young woman with her young husband, in whom she has full faith, and for whom she is ready to give up every thing and follow him cheerfully, in weal or woe, throughout the world. Ten years ago Josephine Scanlan would have done it gladly with the Edward Scanlan whom she then believed in—Now?

She could not do it; she dared not. With

those six little ones intrusted to her charge; sent to her by God Himself, to be her crown of comfort, to keep her heart warm, and open a dim vista of joy in the heavy future, which otherwise might have closed blankly upon her like the dead wall of a cave—no, it was impossible.

The thought of them, and this only alternative of saving them from what she felt would be utter ruin, beat down the cruel feeling of shame which came upon her whenever she considered how she should speak to Mr. Oldham—into what words she should put the blunt request, "Give me some more money?" For she knew that, in degree, her husband was right; the rector was rather hard in the matter of money. That is, where he did give, he gave liberally enough; but he disliked being encroached upon, or applied to unnecessarily; and he was so exceedingly accurate himself in all his pecuniary affairs that he had a great contempt for inaccuracy in others. He had, too, on occasion, the power of making people a little afraid of him; and, brave woman as she was, I think Mrs. Scanlan must have been slightly afraid too—conscious of that sensation which children call "their courage slipping down to the heels of their shoes"—as she sat, lacing her poor, half-worn, nay, shabby boots, on her delicate feet, the morning she had to walk down to the Rectory.

It was a burning hot morning in the middle of June. I can picture her, for I know exactly how she was dressed. She had on her usual print gown, with a tippet of nankeen, and a gipsy hat, such as was then the fashion, of coarse black and white straw. She used to plait this straw herself, and make it into hats for her own use and for the children—large, shady, and comfortable, tied across the crown and under the chin with green ribbon. Her costume was, perhaps, not quite matronly enough, but it suited her circumstances; the lilac print gown washed forever; the hat was much more convenient than the gigantic bonnets, heavy with feathers and flowers, which were then in vogue—and much more economical besides. With her stately gait and still slender, girlish figure, upon which almost any thing looked well, I have little doubt, though the Ditchley ladies who met her that day might have set her down as dressed rather oddly and unfashionably, there was something about Mrs. Scanlan's appearance which marked her unmistakably as "the gentlewoman."

She walked quickly across the common, and through the town, for she wanted to get rid of some ugly thoughts which oppressed her; and, besides, whenever a difficulty had to be met it was her nature to meet it as soon as possible. "If I had to be hanged," she would say, "I would rather be hanged at once. Reprieves are intolerable."

It was not often she quitted her own house for other people's now. For months she had not been inside the pretty Rectory, and the

sight of it in all its summer beauty aroused old remembrances and vain desires. Desires not for herself, but for those belonging to her. Had she been alone she almost thought she would have lived on forever at Wren's Nest, dilapidated and dreary though it was growing. But—her children. It was now most difficult to stow them all away within those narrow walls; and, as for making them really comfortable there, the thing could not be done at all.

She counted them over, her pretty flock: manly César, delicate Adrienne, Louis, who bade fair to be the cleverest of the tribe, Gabrielle, growing up with all the health and beauty that her elder sister lacked, Martin and Catherine, baby nonentities still, but fast turning into individualities, like the rest, for the mother's character had impressed itself upon every one of her children. They were not commonplace at all, but had each strong wills and decided tastes. Poor little souls! How hard it would be to repress their dawning talents and aspirations, to bring them up little better than laborers' children, for so it must be—how could it be different? She did not know where even food and clothing were to come from, to say nothing of education. Oh, if she only had a little money! merely the crumbs from the rich man's table—the merest tithe of that wealth which Mr. Oldham spent so carelessly upon his garden, his conservatories, his beautiful and tasteful house.

She began to think that after all her husband was right in his complaints against fate; that blessings were very unfairly divided, especially money; and that it was hard this childless old bachelor should have so much, and she and her poor young tribe so little. Did the good God look with equal eyes on all? Did He see how she suffered? Was it any use to call upon Him, and ask Him to help her? Not in one of those voluminous and voluble prayers which her husband poured out night and morning, to the phraseology of which she had grown so accustomed that now it all went in at one ear and out at the other. She either never listened at all, or listened with a slight curl of the lip, incredulous both as to the prayer itself, and, God help her, to the Hearer of it also.

Blameworthy she might be—ay, she was. She ought to have been Christian enough to judge between the sham and the reality; wise enough to know that all the musty human curtains hung between may darken the soul's daylight, but can never blot out the existence of the sun, the great Sun of Righteousness, who shines forever above and upon us all. But she was also deeply to be pitied; for the man who made this woman half an unbeliever stood to her in the closest relation that one human being can stand to another, the ruler of her life, the centre of her world, her priest, her lord, her husband.

Usually she was too busy, from hour to hour, and from minute to minute, for these ill thoughts to come; thoughts which, beginning in lack of

faith in man, ended in lack of faith toward God; but to-day, in her long, lonely, fatiguing walk, the devil had had full opportunity to attack her. She felt his cruel black wings flapping behind her at every step she took, and she flung the Rectory gate after her with a clang, hoping in that pleasant, peaceful garden to shut him out, but he would come in. He seemed to jeer at her from under the faded laburnums, and behind the syringa bushes—those mock-orange blossoms, with their faint, sickly smell, sweet at first, but afterward growing painful to the sense. They reminded her of many marriages, which begin so bright at first, and end—God knows how! Marriages in which nobody is particularly to blame, and of which the only thing to be said is, that they were altogether a mistake—a sad mistake.

“But nobody knows it, and nobody ought to know,” said to herself this thirteen-years’ wife—apropos of nothing external—as she walked on in her rare solitude, thinking she would give herself, and the devil, no more opportunities of the same sort again; and forcibly turning her mind away from other things to the special thing she had that morning to do.

She found Mr. Oldham, not in his study, as she expected, but sitting in his veranda. The day was so hot and his book so uninteresting that he had fallen asleep in his arm-chair. As she came suddenly upon him thus he looked so withered and wasted, such a forlorn specimen of a solitary old bachelor, with not a creature to look after him, not a soul to care whether he was alive or dead, that the wife and mother who a moment before had been bitterly envying him now felt a sensation of pity. Her own full, bright home, alive with little voices, and this lonely house and silent garden, where the bees and the birds went on with their humming and singing, as heedless of the old man as if he were not asleep but dead—struck her with forcible contrast, and reproached her unconsciously for all she had been thinking of so bitterly.

She had no time to think more; for Mr. Oldham woke, and apologized, in some confusion, for being so discovered.

“But I really do not believe I was asleep, Madame; I was only meditating. At my age one has plenty of time for meditation. You, I suppose, have very little?”

“None at all.” And the idea of her sitting down, only for ten minutes, idle, with a book in her hand, quite amused Mrs. Scanlan.

The old man seemed much pleased to see her; brought her an arm-chair as comfortable as his own, and thanked her warmly for taking such a long, hot walk just to pay him a neighborly visit.

“It is very kind of you; very kind indeed, and you are most welcome too. I am so much alone.”

His courteous gratitude smote her conscience painfully. Coloring, almost with shame, she said at once, blurting it out in a confused way,



THE RECTOR AT HOME.

very unlike her ordinary sweet and stately manner—

"You must not thank me too much, Mr. Oldham; or I shall feel quite a hypocrite. I am afraid my visit to-day was not at all disinterested, in the sense you put it. I had something which I particularly wished to speak to you about."

"I shall be most happy," returned the rector; and then noticing how far from happy his visitor still looked, he added, "My dear lady, make yourself quite at ease. I like your plain speaking, even though it does take down an old man's vanity a little. How could I expect you, a busy mother of a family, to waste your valuable time inquiring after the health of a stupid old bachelor like me?"

"Have you been ill? I did not know."

"Nobody did, except Waters; I hate to be gossiped about, as you are aware. I think, Mrs. Scanlan, you and I understand one another pretty well by this time?"

"I hope so," she said, smiling; and taking the hint asked no more questions about his illness. She noticed that he looked a little worn, and his hands were "shaky," but he was as polite and kind as usual—rather more so, indeed.

"Come, then, we will sit and talk here, and afterward we will go and look at my roses. I have the finest Banksia you ever saw, just coming into flower."

Banksia roses! and the bitter business that she had to speak about! It was a hard con-

trast for the curate's wife; but she made a violent effort, and began. Once begun it was less difficult to get through with; the rector helping her by his perfect yet courteous silence; never interrupting her by word or look till she had got to the end of her tale, and had made, in as brief language as she could put it, her humiliating request. Then he raised his eyes and looked at her—inquiringly, as it seemed, but satisfied; looked away again—and sat drawing patterns on the gravel-walk with his stick.

"What you tell me, Mrs. Scanlan, you probably think I was unacquainted with, but I am not. Your husband has broached the matter to me several times; he did it a week ago, and I gave him an answer—a direct refusal."

"A direct refusal! And he never told me! He allowed me to come and ask you again!"

For a moment Josephine's indignation had got the better of her prudence.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Oldham," added she, rising at once. "I perceive I ought not to have come here at all. But Mr. Scanlan said—"

She stopped. It was not always safe to repeat what Mr. Scanlan said, without some confirmatory or secondary evidence.

"Mr. Scanlan probably said a great many unnecessary things, as a man does when he is annoyed—and I fear I annoyed him very much that day. But you must pardon me, Madame. Your husband is a young man, and he ought to put up a little with an old man like me. So ought you. My dear lady, will you not sit

down again, and let us talk the matter quietly over?"

She obeyed, though it went against her grain sorely. But the rector was, as he said, an old man, who had been very kind to her and her children. She believed him to be really her friend—in fact, the only friend she had. Since forlorn wives, whom the world supposes well protected, are, consequently, the most friendless women alive. Their one stay failing them, they can have no substitute; they must acquire strength enough to stand alone—or drop.

"Mr. Scanlan told me, of course, of the alternative—the fatal alternative, for me" (here it was difficult to distinguish whether Mr. Oldham meant truth or satire)—"that if his income were not increased he would have to go at once to reside in London. It seems he has admirable prospects there?"

This last sentence, which, though stated as a fact, sounded more like a query, was met by Mrs. Scanlan with a dead silence. In truth, she was so surprised at finding all these things, upon which her husband had bound her to secrecy, made patent by him to the very last person she expected he would have told them to, that she could not find a word to say.

"Or else," pursued Mr. Oldham, "he thinks he has great prospects—which, in a person of my friend Scanlan's enthusiastic temperament, comes to the same thing. But in such important matters I always prefer having the lady's opinion likewise. What do you say? Is it your wish to leave Ditchley?"

"No. Decidedly no."

The old man looked pleased. "I am glad of that. I should be sorry, Madame, that after all these years you liked us so little that you were glad to run away. And, besides, I can not feel that there are such vital objections to Ditchley. It is a pretty neighborhood, with good society, a healthy place for children, and all that. Why should you go to London?"

"My husband wishes it."

"Yes, I remember he said he would be better appreciated there; would attract large congregations; get into the aristocratic evangelical set, and so on. He might; he is a clever man, and a most—ahem!—most popular preacher. But, at the same time, he might not. As I told him, it is just a chance; and if the chance fails, where is he? Also, where are you and the children?"

Mr. Oldham spoke in such a practical, kindly, common-sense way, having evidently taken in the position and thought it over, in a way that people seldom trouble themselves to think over their friends' affairs, that Mrs. Scanlan was a little relieved. He had not been offended, evidently, whatever unpleasant talk had passed between him and her husband. She felt extremely grateful to the old man, and expressed her gratitude warmly.

"No, no. You have nothing to thank me for; it is quite the other way. And I looked forward to having the pleasure of your society,

and my friend Scanlan's, for some years—in fact, till my years are done. It would be a great regret to me if you had to leave Ditchley."

"And to me also. In which," added she, recollecting herself, "I am sure my husband would join. He would hesitate very much at giving up his curacy. But necessity has no law." For it seemed as if the object of her visit were slipping away, so she forcibly brought herself back to the point. "It all comes to this, Mr. Oldham: we can not live upon the income we have from you, and we have no other—not a half-penny but what you give us."

"Indeed? I feared so, but I never was quite sure of it. You must have a sore pull sometimes. Poor lady!"

He just touched her hand, with which she had grasped the arm of his chair. What a thin hand it was! and marked with traces of toil, not usually seen on a lady's hand. Mrs. Scanlan drew it away at once.

"I do not complain," she said, rather proudly. "I shall make ends meet, if I can, but just this year I have been unable to do it, and I feel quite miserable. Do you know we actually owe fifteen pounds!"

"Fifteen pounds—what an alarming sum!" said the rector, smiling.

"Not to you, perhaps; but to me it is alarming. It makes me shrink from going through Ditchley High Street. I think all men's eyes must be upon me. 'There is the clergyman's wife; she owes money, and she can't pay, or won't pay;' for how do they know which it is? Oh! Mr. Oldham, you may think lightly of it, but to me it is dreadful—intolerable!"

She spoke earnestly; almost with the tears in her eyes. It was so long since her heart had been opened to any body, that once beginning to speak she could not stop herself.

"You see, I never was used to this sort of thing. My father—ah! if you had known my father! He would have gone hungry—many a time we have both gone hungry—but to go into debt! we would have shuddered at such a thing. Yes, you should have known my father," she repeated, and her tears began to start.

"I have never named the circumstance to you, Madame, because it was not necessary," said Mr. Oldham, gently; "but once in Paris, at the marriage of Mademoiselle his sister, whom I had met before and much admired, I had the honor of seeing, for five minutes only, Monsieur le Vicomte de Bougainville."

"Greatly astonished, but still unwilling to put questions which Mr. Oldham had evidently no intention of answering—indeed he seemed exceedingly to dislike the subject—Mrs. Scanlan sat silent; and the next moment the butler appeared, announcing lunch.

"You will allow me?" said the rector, offering her his arm. "After luncheon we shall have an opportunity of talking our little business over."

The curate's wife roused herself to necessary courtesy, and her courage, which had been slow-

ly ebbing away, faintly revived. During the meal she and Mr. Oldham conversed together in their usual pleasant way ; on his favorite hobbies, his garden and so on ; nay, he paid her every attention that he could think of ; even sending for a bottle of his most precious Burgundy, in celebration, he said, of the rare honor of having her for his guest. His kindness comforted her even more than his wine.

Besides—alas for poor mortality!—to her, faint from her hot walk, this plentiful meal, more luxurious than any dinner she had had for months ; and the peaceful eating of it, surrounded by the quiet atmosphere of wealthy ease, affected her with a sensation of unaccustomed pleasantness. She had never cared for luxuries when she had them ; but now, in her long lack of them, they seemed to have acquired an adventitious value. She almost wished she had a beggar's wallet, and a beggar's cool effrontery, that she might take a portion of the delicately-cooked dinner home to her children, especially her sickly Adrienne ; and she gazed round the large, cool, airy dining-room with an unconscious sigh.

"You seem to admire this room," said Mr. Oldham, smiling.

"Yes, I always did, you know. The Rectory is, to my mind, the prettiest house in Ditchley. And I have a weakness for all pretty things."

"So have I. And sometimes I think I might indulge it even more than I do—in collecting pictures, for instance. But where would be the good of this—to an old bachelor like me, who can not, at best, enjoy them long ? and at my death they would be all dispersed. No, no ; I have made up my mind to keep to my old plain ways, and leave extravagance for those that will come after me."

It was the first time Mr. Oldham had ever openly reverted to his heir or heirs. Of course they existed : rich men have always a tribe of seventeenth cousins and so on, eager to drop in for what may be left them ; but none such had ever appeared at Ditchley. The town and neighborhood seemed as ignorant on the subject as Mrs. Scanlan ; in fact, the general opinion was that Mr. Oldham meant to leave all his money to some charitable institution. He was, she knew, the last of his family—a sad thing in itself, and not a pleasant topic to speak upon with him ; so she tried to turn the current of conversation by some commonplace remark, hoping that "those which came after him" would long be kept out of their inheritance.

"Thank you. However, when they do come into it they will find it safe and sure. I take a good while to make up my mind, but having once made it up I rarely change it. My heirs may count securely upon their property."

It was an odd remark, and Josephine was puzzled how to reply to it. Of course, it showed Mr. Oldham's friendly spirit toward herself and her interest in his affairs thus to speak of them to her ; but her own business was too near her heart, and she was pardonably indifferent as to

who might or might not inherit Mr. Oldham's money. The humble fortunes of herself and her family were of much more importance to her just then. Still, she would not force the conversation ; but she waited with nervous impatience for her host to quit the dining-room and lead the way into his study.

He did so at length ; though even when there he settled himself in his chair, and pointed to her to take another, without testifying any immediate intention of beginning the subject which lay so close to her heart.

"Do you ever think of dying, Mrs. Scanlan ?"

It was an odd question, odd even to ludicrousness ; but she restrained her inclination to see it in that light, and said, gravely :

"In a religious point of view, do you mean, Mr. Oldham ?"

"No ; a worldly one. Do you consider yourself likely to have a long life ?"

"My family were all long-lived, and I am myself, so far as I know, a very healthy person. Yes ; I hope I shall live to see all my children grown up. God grant it !"

She slightly sighed. For, when in her last crisis of motherhood she had a nearer risk of her life than ordinary, it had struck her—what if she were to die, leaving those poor little ones of hers with no shelter, no protection against the hard world, except their father ? And since that time she had taken especial care of her own health, and striven hard against a weary longing for rest that sometimes came over her, praying that she might be forgiven for it, and not allowed to die until she was quite an old woman, or until her children needed her no more.

"My life is in God's hands," she resumed, "but, humanly speaking, I see no reason why it should not be a long one. I trust it will be, for my children's sake and my husband's."

"Your husband is less strong than you ; at least he always tells me so. When he gets into a melancholy mood he says he shall never live to be my age."

"I think he will, though," replied Mrs. Scanlan, cheerfully, "especially if he has no very hard work, and resides always in the country. Which is one of my strong reasons for disliking to remove to London."

"Stay ; we will enter upon that matter presently. Just now I wish to speak to you about—what I did not at first mean to tell you, but have decided that it is better I should—some private affairs of my own. A secret, in short. I know that you can keep a secret."

Mrs. Scanlan bent her head assentingly, wondering what on earth was coming next. Surely, she thought, it is not possible that the old man is going to be married ! He was seventy-five at least ; yet such things do happen, even to septuagenarians. But his next sentence removed this doubt.

"It is a secret that you will have to keep for some time—possibly several years. And you must keep it implicitly and entirely. You must not even tell it to your husband."

"Not tell my husband!" cried Josephine, drawing back. "Then, I think, Mr. Oldham, you had better not confide it to me at all. It is exceedingly difficult—not to enter upon the question of whether it is right or wrong—for any wife to keep a secret from her husband."

"May be; I have never had the advantage of being married, and am certainly not likely now to risk the experiment. But still, in the matter of Mrs. Waters you did not tell your husband."

"That was different," said she, hesitating.

"Nevertheless, here the case stands. Either you must promise not to communicate this fact to your husband, or I can not confide it to you. And it is important—indeed, of the most vital importance—that you should know it."

The rector spoke decidedly, with that decision which, whenever he chose to exercise it, she was aware was inflexible. He did not care to fight about small things, but in great ones, when his mind was made up, you might as well attempt to move a mountain as Mr. Oldham.

"It is a secret," continued he, "which is exclusively mine; which would do Scanlan no good to learn, and might do him considerable harm. The greatest kindness I can show him, I honestly believe, is to keep it from him."

"Then why tell it to me?"

"Because you are another sort of a person. It could not possibly harm you, and might be useful to you in some degree—you and the children. I advise you to hear it, if only for the sake of the children."

"I hate mysteries," said Mrs. Scanlan, uneasily, and turning over in her mind what this secret of the rector's could possibly be. Was it any difficulty between him and his bishop, in which Mr. Scanlan was also concerned? Or was it—this suggestion occurred to her as most probable—something relating to Mr. Scanlan's future; perhaps his chance of the next presentation to the living of Ditchley, on Mr. Oldham's decease? The rector's next words confirmed her in this idea.

"I hate mysteries, too, Madame, unless they are quite unavoidable, as this is. I ask from you a plain Yes or No, nor can I give you any more information to influence you on the matter, except that when you know my secret, I believe, I am almost sure, that you will not think it necessary to go and live in London."

The temptation was sore. "Oh! Mr. Oldham," she said, piteously, "why do you try me so hard?"

"I do it for your own good. Do you think I don't feel for you, my poor girl?" and his tone was almost paternal in its kindness. "But the circumstances of the case are quite inevitable. Either you must accept my secret, and keep it from your husband, and from every human being during my lifetime, or I shall consider the conditions void; and all things shall be as if they had never been."

"I do not understand—"

"There is no necessity that you should un-

derstand. Only, will you trust me? Have I not always been a good friend to you? Can you not believe that I shall remain so to the last? And I give you my honor—the honor of the last of the Oldhams"—added he, with a sort of proud pathos, that went right to the heart of this mother of a rising race, "that what I ask of you will never trouble you, or grieve you, or compromise you in the smallest degree. It is *my secret*. I might have kept it from you to the last, only," with an air of amused benevolence, "I think you will be the better for hearing it. I think, too, that Scanlan himself would urge you to accept my conditions—if he knew."

"Let me tell him," pleaded the wife. "Let me just tell my husband that there is a secret; which he must allow me to keep, even from himself, for the present."

Mr. Oldham shook his head. "You Quixotic woman! You are like Charity, that 'believeth all things, hopeth all things.' But I know better. No, no. Don't mistake me. I like Scanlan very much. He is a clever fellow; a pleasant fellow; he suits me as a curate. I never wish to part from him. Still, my dear lady, you do not require me to tell you that—that—" he hesitated—"Mrs. Scanlan is a very superior person to her husband."

Poor Mr. Oldham! in his ignorant bachelorthood he had not a suspicion of the effect his compliment would produce.

The blood rushed violently into Josephine's face; she drew herself up with a haughtiness which he had never before seen.

"Sir!—Mr. Oldham!—you can not surely mean what you are saying. Let us dismiss this subject, and confine ourselves entirely to the matter in hand—the matter my husband sent me to discuss with you. May we enter upon it at once? for I must go home to my children."

Mr. Oldham regarded her a moment, and then held out his hand almost humbly.

"Pardon, Madame. I was forgetting myself, and speaking to you as if you were my daughter. You almost might have been. I was once in love with a lady very like you."

There was a slight twitch in the withered face, and the momentary emotion passed. Who the "lady" was, Mrs. Scanlan did not, of course, ask him. Years afterward she had reason to think it might have been her aunt, that beautiful Mademoiselle Josephine de Bougainville who died young, soon after her marriage, which had been a marriage *de convenance*; but the real facts, buried far back in long forgotten years, Josephine never inquired into and never learned.

"The matter in hand, as you termed it," resumed Mr. Oldham, "is easily settled. I like you—I like your husband. I wish him to remain my curate as long as I live. Therefore, tell me how much income you think necessary for your comfort, and you shall have it. Give me my check-book there, state your sum, and we will arrange the matter at once. And now, may I tell you my secret?"

Mrs. Scanlan had listened in wondering thankfulness, too great for words; but now she recoiled. Evidently the old man was bent upon his point, and upon exacting his conditions to the letter. Her strait was very hard. The simple duty of a wife—to hide nothing from her husband; to hear nothing that she will require to hide—Josephine never doubted for a moment; but hers was an exceptional case.

She knew well enough, and was convinced the rector knew, that Edward Scanlan was the last man in the world to be trusted with a secret. At least, so she should have said or him had he been any other man than her husband; and did his being her husband alter the facts of the case, or her judgment upon it? We may be silent concerning the weak points of our nearest and dearest; but to ignore them, to be willfully blind to them, to refuse to guard against them, is, to any prudent and conscientiously-minded person, clearly impossible.

Could it be that in refusing the rector's conditions, which her judgment told her he, who knew her husband's character as well as she did, was warranted in exacting, she was straining at gnats and swallowing camels? setting up a sham eidolon of wifely duty, and sacrificing to it the interests of her whole family, including her husband's?

"Are you sure it will never harm him—that he will never blame me for doing this?"

"Scanlan blame you?—oh no! Quite impossible," answered the rector, with a slight curl of the lip. "I assure you, you may quiet all apprehensions on that score. He will consider it the best thing you could possibly do for him."

Yet still poor Josephine hesitated. That clear sense of the right, which had always burned in her heart with a steady flame, seemed flickering to and fro, turned and twisted by side winds of expediency. The motto of the De Bougainville family, "*Fais ce que tu dois, advenne que pourra*," rung in her ears with a mocking iteration. In her girlhood she had obeyed it always—had dared every thing, doubted nothing. Could wifehood and motherhood have made her less honorable, less brave?

"Come," said Mr. Oldham, "this is too important a matter for you to give, or me to take, a rash answer. There is a blank check, fill it up as you think fair. And meantime go into the garden and look at my roses, just for a quarter of an hour."

With gentle force he led her to the French window of his study, handed her through, and closed it behind her, shutting her out alone in the sunshiny garden.

Therein she wandered about for fully the prescribed time. What inward struggle she went through, who can know? Whether she was able to satisfy herself that she was doing right; that circumstances justified what, in most other women's case, would actually be wrong, and she would have been the first to pronounce wrong, who can tell? Or, perhaps, goaded on by

the necessities of her hard lot, she deliberately set aside the question of whether her act was right or wrong, and was determined to do it—for her children's sake. If any thing could turn a woman into a thief, a murderer, a sinner of any sort, I think it would be for the love of, or the terror for, her children.

I do not plead for Josephine Scanlan. I only pity her. And I feel—ay, I feel it even with my own husband's honest eyes looking into mine—that, had my lot been hers, I should have acted exactly the same.

She came back to Mr. Oldham.

"Well, my dear lady, have you decided?"

"Yes. You may tell me any thing you like, and so long as you live I will keep your secret faithfully."

"As you did Mrs. Waters's?"

"That was a different matter; but I will keep your secret too, even from my husband."

"Thank you." And Mr. Oldham shook her hand warmly. "You shall never regret the—the sacrifice."

But now that he had her promise, he seemed in no hurry to claim it. He finished writing out the check, putting in a sum a little beyond that which she had named, and then, taking up his hat and stick, composedly accompanied her round the garden, pointing out his favorite flowers and his various improvements.

"That Banksia rose, is it not fine? I shall train it all over the veranda. Indeed, I have thought of making a proper rosary, or rosarium; but it would be expensive, and is hardly worth while, since the Rectory comes into other hands at my death. Oldham Court, however, will be the property of my successor—and a very fine property it is—quite unencumbered. My heirs might run through it in no time; however, I shall take care to prevent that. My friend and executor, Dr. Waters, and my lawyer, are both remarkably acute, firm, and honorable men."

"Oh! yes," replied poor Josephine, answering at random, for her patience was at its last gasp. But still Mr. Oldham went on talking—she scarcely heard what—about every thing except the important secret; and not until the very last minute, when he had let her out at the gate and stood leaning against it, still conversing with her, and regarding her in a tender, wistful sort of way, did he refer to what he had to tell.

"I am laying on you a heavy burden, you think, Mrs. Scanlan? Perhaps it is so. But be easy; you may not have to bear it very long. Only during my lifetime."

"That may be, I trust, many years."

"And, possibly, not one year. I had a slight seizure the other day, which made me arrange all my affairs. But do not speak of this. It is of no consequence. Go home now, and mind, what I have to tell you must make no difference there; every thing must go on as heretofore. Only you need not come to me again, looking the picture of despair, as you did to-day."



MES. SCANLAN'S SCRUPLES.

"Well, I do not return in despair, thanks to your kindness. And on my next visit I will take care to put on my best looks, and bring a child or two with me, to amuse myself and you. Shall I?"

"Certainly. Yours are charming children, and—" he added, becoming suddenly grave, "do not torment yourself any more about their future; it is not necessary. This is my secret—a very simple one. Yesterday I made my will, and I left you my heiress. Not a word. Adieu!"

He turned, and walked quickly back into his garden. Mrs. Scanlan stood, transfixed with astonishment, at the Rectory gate; and then, there being nothing else left for her to do, she also turned and walked home.

CHAPTER VI.

JOSEPHINE SCANLAN walked home from the Rectory that afternoon feeling like a woman in a dream.

At first she was so stunned by the tidings she had received that she did not realize her

position. How strange!—how very strange!—to be the heiress of a man who in the course of nature could not possibly live many years, and might pass away any day—leaving behind him, for her and hers, at the least a very handsome competence, probably considerable wealth—wealth enough to make her mind entirely at ease concerning the future of her children. Her bright, bold César, her sensitive Adrienne, and all her other darlings, loved, each as they came, with the infinitely divisible yet undivided love of a mother—they would never have to suffer as she had suffered. Thank God!

This was her prominent thought. It came upon her gradually, deliciously! on leaving the garden-gate, where, quite overcome, she had stood ever so long under shelter of the great white-thorn tree: for years the sight and smell of the faint pinky blossoms of the fading flowers reminded her of the emotions of that hour. Slowly her confused mind settled into calmness, and she took in the full extent of all that had happened to her since morning, and the total change that had come to her lot.

Not externally. It was obvious that Mr. Oldham meant to make no public acknowledg-

ment of his intentions with regard to her. Also, he was leaving his property to *herself*; he had said distinctly "my heiress:" never naming her husband. These two facts startled her. The rector, with all his reticent politeness, was then an acuter man than she supposed, and had seen further than she thought he had into the secrets of her married life, and the inner mysteries of her household. He had his own reasons—and her unwarped judgment told her they were quite feasible and good ones—for exacting from her this promise, and requiring that the daily existence of the little family at Wren's Nest should go on as heretofore, and that Edward Scanlan should be told nothing whatever of the change that was likely to take place in his fortunes. It was best so. Edward Scanlan's wife knew that quite as well as Mr. Oldham did.

Some may hold that she erred here in seeing with such clear vision her husband's faults. Can it be that in any relation of life, conjugal or otherwise, it is one's duty to shut one's eyes to facts, and do one's best to believe a lie? I think not. I think all righteous love partakes in this of the love of God—that it can "hate the sin and love the sinner:" that without deceiving itself for a moment as to the weak points of the object beloved, it can love on in spite of them; up to a certain limit, often a very large limit, of endurance: and that when love fails, this endurance still remains. Besides, mercifully, love gets into a habit of loving, not easily broken through. And Josephine had been married thirteen years.

In all those thirteen years she had never carried a lighter heart than that which seemed to leap in her bosom as gradually she recognized the change that those few words of Mr. Oldham's had wrought in her thoughts, hopes, and plans, though all must necessarily be kept to herself, and not allowed to influence her outside life. Still, this was not so hard as it might once have been: she had been gradually forced into keeping many things to herself: it was useless, worse than useless, to speak of them to her husband. She always intuitively kept from him perplexing and vexatious things; it would not be much more difficult to keep from him this good thing. Only for the present too: he would one day enjoy it all. And even now she brought back to him the welcome news of an addition to his salary; large enough, she fondly believed, to make him fully satisfied and content.

She was quite content. Before she had walked half a mile the morning's events had grown to her an unmixed good, in which she rejoiced without a single drawback. She had no hesitation whatever in accepting the unexpected heirship. Mr. Oldham had no near kindred who could look for any thing from him; and, even if he had, could he not do as he liked with his own? He was an old bachelor: no one had any claims upon him: he was free to leave his property as he chose. Nor in her maternal vanity did Mrs. Scanlan much wonder

at his choice. She herself was of course merely nominal. She might be quite elderly before the fortune came to her, but it would assuredly come to her children; and who that looked at her César, her Louis, would not be glad to leave a fortune to such boys? In her heart the mother considered Mr. Oldham a wise man as well as a generous.

After taking a slight circuit by the river-side, just to compose her mind, she walked through Ditchley town; walked with an erect bearing, afraid of meeting nobody. For was not the check in her pocket, and her future safe and sure? No such humiliation as had happened lately would ever happen to her again. Had not the check been made out to her husband, and requiring his indorsement, she would have paid great part of it away on the spot—this "painfully honest" woman—as Mr. Scanlan sometimes called her. In the mean time, she went into every shop as she passed, and collected all her bills, saying she should go round and pay them early next morning.

Then she walked gayly across the common with her heart full of gratitude to both God and man. She felt kindly toward every creature living. A beggar whom she chanced to meet she relieved with silver instead of copper this time. And every neighbor she met, instead of slipping away from, she stopped to speak to; gave and accepted several invitations; and talked and smiled so brightly that more than one person told her how very well she was looking. At which she did not wonder much; she felt as if henceforward she should always be well; as if her dark days were gone by forever. We all have such seasons, and wonder at them when the dark days return again, as return they must; but they are very blessed at the time, and they leave a dim odor of happiness behind them which refreshes us more than we know.

When Mrs. Scanlan came to the door of her house—that small house in which she had lived so long, and might have to live—how much longer?—the first that ran out to meet her was her little daughter.

"Mamma, you bring good news!" cried the child, who was a wise child, and could already read, plain as a book, every expression of her mother's face.

And then the mother recognized, for a moment like the touch of a thorn on her hand, the burden which had been laid upon her, or rather which she had deliberately laid upon herself, in accepting Mr. Oldham's secret and its conditions. She did bring good news; yet, for the first time, she could not tell them, could not ask her family to rejoice with her, except to a very limited extent. For the first time she was obliged to prevaricate; to drop her conscious eyes before those of her own child—so clear, so earnest in their sympathy.

"Yes, my darling, I do bring good news. Mr. Oldham has been exceedingly kind. He has done what I wanted. We shall be quite rich now."



"MAMMA, YOU BRING GOOD NEWS!"

For of course Adrienne knew of all the troubles—so did Bridget—so did the whole family. They were troubles of a kind not easily disguised: and, besides, Mr. Scanlan was so incautious and careless in his talk before both servant and children, that to keep things concealed from either was nearly impossible. Mrs. Scanlan had tried to do it as much as she could, especially when César and Adrienne, growing up a big boy and girl, began to enter into their mother's cares with a precocious anxiety painful to witness; but at last she gave up the attempt in despair, and let matters take their chance. Better they should know every thing than take garbled statements or false and foolish notions into their little heads. Were not the children's souls in the mother's hand?—she believed so.

"Yes, Adrienne, my pet, you need not fret any more. Mr. Oldham has increased papa's salary: we must all be grateful to him, and do as much as ever we can for him to the end of his days."

"Must we? Oh, of course we will! But, mamma, if, as papa has just been telling me, the rector has paid him far too little, why need

we be so exceedingly grateful? It is but fair."

Mrs. Scanlan made no reply. Again the thorn pressed, and another, a much sharper-pricking thorn, which wounded her sometimes. When the father could get no better company, he used to talk to the children, particularly to Adrienne, and often put into the little innocent minds ideas and feelings which took the mother days and weeks to eradicate. She could not say plainly, "Your father has been telling you what is not true," or "Papa takes quite a mistaken idea of the matter, which is in reality so and so:" all she could do was to trust to her own strong influence, and that of time, in silently working things round. That daringly self-reliant and yet pathetic motto of Philip II., "Time and I against any two," often rung in the head of this poor, brave, lonely woman—forced into unnatural unwomanliness—until sometimes she almost hated herself, and thought, could she meet herself like any other person, Josephine Scanlan would have been the last person she would have cared to know!

"Adrienne, we will not discuss the question of fairness just now. Enough that Mr. Oldham

is a very good man, whom both papa and I exceedingly respect and like."

"I don't think papa likes him; for he is always laughing at him and his oddities."

"We often laugh at people for whom we feel most kindly," said Mrs. Scanlan, formally, as if enunciating a moral axiom; and then, while drawing the little thin arms round her neck, and noticing the prematurely eager and anxious face, the thought that her frail, delicate flower would never be broken by the sharp blasts of poverty, came with such a tide of thankfulness that Josephine felt she could bear any other trouble now. Ay, even the difficult task of meeting her husband and telling him only half that was in her mind: of having afterward, for an indefinite time, to go on walking and talking, eating and sleeping beside him, carrying on their ordinary daily life, conscious every instant of the secret so momentous which she dared not in the smallest degree betray.

Yet she was on the point of betraying it within the first half hour.

Edward Scanlan had seized upon the check with the eagerness of a boy. One of the excuses his wife often made for him was, that in many things he was so very boy-like still, and could not be judged by the laws which regulate duty to a man, now considerably past thirty, a husband, and the father of a family; for he seemed as if he had never been born to carry the weight of these "encumbrances." Delightedly he looked at the sum, which represented to his sanguine mind an income of unlimited capacity. He began reckoning up all he wanted, for himself and the household; and had spent half the money already in imagination, while his wife was telling him how she had obtained it.

On this head, however, he was not inquisitive. It was obtained, and that was enough. He never noticed the blanks in her story—her many hesitations, her sad shamefacedness, and her occasional caresses, as if she wished to atone for some unconscious wrong done toward him which her tender conscience could not help grieving for, even though he himself might neither feel it nor know it.

But when she told him of all she had done in Ditchley as she passed, and of the large sum she was to pay away the following morning, Mr. Scanlan was exceedingly displeased.

"What a ridiculous hurry you are in! As if those impertinent fellows could not wait a little, after having bothered us so much. I've a great mind not to pay them for ever so long, only that would look so odd in a clergyman."

"Or in any man," said the wife, quietly. "Here is the list of what we owe; we must think twice, you see, before we lay out the remainder."

"What, are you going to pay away all that money at once? Why, you might as well have brought me home nothing at all! We shall be none the better for Oldham's 'generosity,' as you call it. Generosity, indeed! When you were at it, Josephine, and he allowed you *carte*

blanche, why in the world didn't you ask him for a little more?"

Josephine rose in warm indignation. "Ask him for more, when he has already given us so much? When he is going to give us—"

Every thing, she was about to say, but stopped herself just in time. Not, however, before Edward's sharp ears—I have already said, he was at once careless and cunning in money-matters—had caught the word.

"Given us what? More silk gowns, or books for the children, or garden-stuff for the house? These are his principal sort of gifts—mere rubbish! He never gives any thing to me: never seems to consider the sacrifice I am making every day I stay on in stupid Ditchley. And yet he must know my value, or he never would have increased my salary as he has done to-day. It is just a conscience twinge, or because he knows he could not get any body else to do my work for the money."

"You know he could, Edward. He told me plainly that for half your salary he could get twenty curates to-morrow."

"But not a curate like me!"

Mrs. Scanlan looked silently at her husband. Perhaps she was taking his measure; perhaps she had taken it long ago; and accepted the fact that, whatever he was, he was her husband—possessed of certain qualities which he could no more help than he could the color of his hair; a rather lofty estimate of the individual called Edward Scanlan was one of them.

"Don't you think, Edward, that instead of arguing about our blessings in this way, we had better accept them, and be thankful for them? I am, I know."

But no, the mean soul is never thankful. Into its capacious maw endless benefits from heaven and from man—that is, from heaven through man—may be poured, and still the cry is continually, "Give, give!" and the moment the gifts stop the murmurs begin again.

Before Edward Scanlan had ended his first five minutes of rejoicing over his unexpectedly large check, he began to feel annoyed that it was not larger. It was not until his wife, watching him with those clear, righteous eyes of hers, made him feel a little ashamed of himself, that he vouchsafed to own she had "done pretty well" in her mission of the morning.

"A hard day's work, too, it was, my dear; a long walk and a good deal of talking. You are a very good wife to me, and I owe you much."

Josephine smiled. Yes, it had been a hard day's work to her, and he did owe her much; rather more than he knew. It is astonishing how often people apologize for errors never committed and wrongs never perceived, while the real errors, the most cruel wrongs, are not even guessed at by the parties concerned in the infliction of them.

While Mrs. Scanlan busied herself in preparing the tea or in holding baby Catherine while Bridget laid the cloth—Bridget, who, of course, had quickly learned every thing, and hovered

about her mistress with eyes of rapturous congratulation and admiration—it did occur to her that there must be something a little wrong somewhere; that there was an incongruousness, almost amounting to the ludicrous, in the rector's future heiress doing all these menial duties. But the idea amused more than perplexed her: and ere many hours had passed the whole thing seemed to grow so unreal, that next morning when she woke up she almost imagined she had dreamt it all.

When, a few days after, Mr. Oldham paid his customary visit to Wren's Nest, she took an opportunity of expressing her gratitude for all his kindness, and slightly reverted to his last words over the garden gate: but he stopped her at once.

"Never refer to that again. Perhaps I was a fool to tell you, but it's done now. Only mind, let all be as if I never had told you."

"I am sorry—if your reasons—"

"My reasons are, that few men like to be reminded of their own death; I don't. I shall keep to my bargain, Mrs. Scanlan; but if you ever name it again, to me or to any other creature, it is canceled. Remember, a will can be burnt as easily as made."

"Certainly," replied Josephine, though with a sense of humiliation that was almost agony. Mingled with it came a sudden fear, the faint, cold fear of the shipwrecked sailor who has seen a speck on the horizon which looks like a sail, and may turn out to be no sail at all, or else drifts away from him—and then? Nevertheless, she had self-control enough to say calmly, "I quite understand you, Mr. Oldham, and I should wish you always to do exactly what you think right."

"I believe that, Madame, and I am accordingly doing it," said the old man, with a return to his ordinary suave politeness, and calling one of the children in to the conference so that it could not possibly be continued.

It never was either continued or revived. The rector's silence on the subject was so complete that oftentimes during the long months and years which followed Josephine could scarcely force herself to believe there was any truth in what he had told her, or that it was not entirely the product of her own vivid imagination.

But at first she accepted her good fortune with fullness of faith, and rejoiced in it unlimitedly. It was such an innocent rejoicing too; it harmed nobody: took away from nobody's blessings. The fortune must come to some one; the good old man could not carry it away with him; he would enjoy it to the full as long as he lived, and by the time death touched him he would just drop off like the last leaf from the bough, perhaps not sorry to go, and gladdened in his final hour by the feeling that his death would benefit other lives, young and bright, ready to take up the ended hope, and carry it triumphantly on to future generations.

That desire of founding a family, of living

again in her posterity, was I think peculiarly strong in Josephine Scanlan. The passionate instinct of motherhood—perhaps the deepest instinct women have—(and God knows they need to have it, to help them along that thorny path which every mother has trod since mother Eve)—in her did not end with her own children. She sometimes sat and dreamed of her future race, the new generations that should be born of her, impressed with her soul and body—for she rather admired her bodily self, it was so like her father—dreamed of them as poets dream of fame and conquerors of glory. She often looked at her César—who after the curious law by which nature so often reproduces the father in the daughter, and again in the daughter's son, was an almost startling likeness of the old Vicomte de Bougainville—and thought, with a joy she could scarcely repress, of the old race revived, though the name was gone; of her boy inheriting fortune and position enough to maintain the dignity of that race before all the world.

And then César was such a good boy, simple-minded, dutiful; chivalric and honorable in all his feelings; so exactly after the old type of the De Bougainvilles, who had once fought for their country as bravely as at last, for religion's sake, they fled from it; sustaining through all reverses the true nobility, which found its outlet in the old Vicomte's favorite motto, "Noblesse oblige." Josephine watched the lad growing taller and handsomer, bolder and stronger, month by month and year by year, much as Sarah must have watched Isaac; seeing in him not only Isaac her son, but Isaac the child of promise, and the father of unborn millions.

I think Mrs. Scanlan must have been very happy about this time. Her worldly load was completely taken off her shoulders for the time being. She had enough and to spare. She could pay all her debts, and give her children many comforts that had long been lacking. She had not the sharp sense of angry pain which she used to experience, ever and anon, when, after waiting week after week till she could fairly afford Adrienne a new warm cloak, or César a pair of winter boots, their father would come in quite cheerily, and claim her admiration for a heap of musty volumes; valuable and expensive theological works which he had just purchased: not that he wanted to read them; he was no great reader at any time; but "they looked so well for a clergyman to have in his library." And when she remonstrated, he would argue how much better food for the mind was than clothes for the body; and how a good wife ought always to prefer her husband's tastes to her children's. And it was so easy to talk, and Edward Scanlan's arguments were so voluminous, that sometimes he half convinced his wife she was in the wrong; till, left alone, her honest conscience went back with a bound, like a half-strung bow, to the old conviction. She knew not how to say it, but somehow she felt it, and all the eloquence in the world could not

convince her that black was white, or perhaps only gray—very delicately and faintly gray.

But now the sunshine of hope which had fallen across her path—or still more, her future path—seemed to warm Josephine's nature through and through, and make her more lenient toward every one, especially her husband. She felt drawn to him by a reviving tenderness, which he might have a little missed of late had he been a sensitive man; but he was not. His wrongs and unhappinesses were more of the material than spiritual kind—more for himself than for other people. He regretted extremely his children's shabby clothes, but it never struck him to be anxious because their minds were growing up more ill-clad than their bodies. For they had little or no education; and for society scarcely any beyond Bridget's and their mother's, though they might have had worse, at any rate.

Mr. Scanlan was exceedingly troubled about the present, because the luxuries of life were so terribly wanting at Wren's Nest: but he rarely perplexed himself about the future—his own or his family's. Whatever pleased him at the time, he did, and was satisfied with doing: he never looked ahead, not for a single day. "Take no thought for the morrow," was a favorite text of his whenever his wife expressed any anxiety. What on earth could she find to be anxious about?—she was not the bread-winner of the family. It was he who had to bear all these burdens, and very sincerely he pitied himself; so much so that at times his wife pitied him too, believing him, not untruly, to be one of those characters whose worst faults are eliminated by adversity. For the fact that

"Satan now is wiser than of yore,
And tempts by making rich, not making poor,"

was not then credited by Josephine Scanlan. She still felt that the man of Uz was supreme in his afflictions; and often she read the Book of Job with a strange sort of sympathy. True, she did not understand half his trials—"her children were with her in the house;" her "candle" was still "in its place"—that bright light of contentment which illumined all the poverty of Wren's Nest. Health was there too: for the lightly-fed and hardly-worked enjoy oftentimes a wonderful immunity from sickness. But still it seemed to her that these blessings were not so very blessed, or lack of money neutralized them all, at least with regard to her husband.

His complainings, she fondly hoped, would be quieted by prosperity: when they had a larger house, and she could get the children out of his way in some distant nursery; when he had more servants to wait upon him, more luxuries to gratify him, and fewer opportunities of growing discontented by the daily contrast between his neighbors' wealth and his own poverty. For, unfortunately, there were not many "poor" people in Ditchley, society being composed of the county families, the well-off townsfolk, and the

working-classes. And Mr. Scanlan was always more prone to compare himself with those above him than those below him, wondering why Providence had not more equally balanced things, and why those stupid squires and contented shop-keepers should have so much money to do what they liked with, and he so little—he whose likings were of such a refined and superior order that it seemed a sin and shame they should be denied gratification.

For, as he reasoned, and his wife tried to reason too, his pleasures were all so harmless. He was no drunkard—though he liked a glass of wine well enough; he seldom philandered with young ladies, except in the mildest clerical way; was never long absent from home; and, as for his extraordinary talent for getting rid of money, he got rid of it certainly in no wicked way, but scattered it about more with the innocent recklessness of a child than the deliberate extravagance of a man. It was hard to stint him, still harder to blame him; much easier to blame "circumstances"—which made all the difference between a harmless amusement and a serious error. When he was a rich man he would be quite different.

At least so thought his wife; and tried to excuse him, and make the best of him, and believe in all his possible capacities for good; also in the actual good there was in him, which might have satisfied some people, who are content to accept as virtue the mere negation of vice, or to rule their affections by the safe law which I have heard enunciated by mediocre goodness concerning absolute badness: "Why should I dislike the man when he has never harmed me?" But to a woman whose standard of right was distinct from any personal benefit received by her, or personal injury done to her; who loved for love's sake, and hated only where she despised; who had begun life with a high ideal, and a passionate necessity for its realization in all her dear ones, especially the dearest and closest of all—her husband—to such a one, what must this kind of married life have been?

Still, her heart grew tenderer over the father of her children. She saw him, and all he did—or rather all he left undone—in the fairest light. When he grumbled she took it very patiently, more patiently than usual, thinking with satisfaction of her comfortable secret—how all these annoyances were only temporary; how he would by-and-by become a rich man, able to indulge himself as he chose. For in her heart she liked to see her husband happy—liked to give him any lawful pleasures, and minister even to his whims and vagaries, when this could be done conscientiously, without her having the pang of knowing that every selfish luxury of the father's was taking the very bread out of the mouths of the children. Not that he did this intentionally; but he did do it; because the even balance and necessity of things was a matter Edward Scanlan could never be taught to understand.

Still, he was very good, on the whole, for

some time after he received this addition to his income. It allowed him more pleasures; it lessened his wife's cares, and made her less obliged to contradict him. She grew softer in her manner to him—and Edward Scanlan was one who thought much about outside manner, without troubling himself to investigate what feelings lay beneath. In their mutual relief of mind the husband and wife drew nearer together—dangerously so, for the preservation of Mr. Oldham's secret.

Righteous hypocrite as she fully believed she was, Mrs. Scanlan often felt herself to be a terrible hypocrite after all. Twenty times a day she longed to throw her arms round her husband's neck, and whisper that she had a secret—though one which did not injure him, quite the contrary! Whenever he was vexed about little things, she thirsted to tell him that his poverty days would not last forever—that she would by-and-by be a rich heiress, able to give him all he wanted, and rejoice in the giving. That keenest joy of wealth—to lavish it upon others—flashed out sometimes from the distant future, with a glow that lightened for her many a present gloom.

Still, things were hard now and then, and she had many a twinge of conscience as to how far she was doing right, and what her husband would think of her when he really knew all, as he necessarily must, some day. More than once she definitively resolved to go and speak to the rector—whether he liked it or not; unburden herself of all her doubts, and implore him to free her from her promise, and take away this load from her heart—a load heavier than he, as a bachelor, could comprehend. Little he knew how fatal to happiness is any concealment between married people, whose chief strength and surest consolation lies in being, for good and ill, absolutely and perfectly one.

With this intent Josephine had actually one day put on her bonnet, meaning to go to pay a visit to the Rectory, ostensibly to excuse herself and the children from a tea-party there—a feast on the lawn—the year had again come round to the time of open-air delights—when her husband entered the room, and asked her where she was going.

Her answer was, of course, the truth, though not, alas! the whole truth.

"Excuse yourself from the Rectory feast? What a ridiculous thing! To decline Mr. Oldham's invitation, because the children had an engagement elsewhere—at a common farmhouse, too!"

Still, Josephine reasoned, it was a prior engagement; and the people at the farm had been very kind to the children.

"But they are such unimportant people. Annoying them does not matter; now annoying Mr. Oldham does. I never noticed the thing much till lately, when some neighbor or other put it into my head; but Oldham does seem to have taken an extraordinary fancy for our children."

"They are very good children," said the mother, with a slight trembling of the voice.

"Oh yes, of course. And pretty, too—some of them. Don't be up in arms on their account, mamma, as if I were always crying them down. I see their good points just as much as you do. And if the old fellow really has taken a liking to them, I'm sure I don't object to your cultivating him as much as ever you like."

"Cultivating him!—"

"I mean—with an eye to his leaving them, something. He can't live forever; and when he dies, some small sum—even a hundred or two—would be a great help to us."

Josephine stood dumb. Oh, if she had had the free, clear conscience of a year ago, how indignantly she would have repudiated such a motive! as she used to do all other similar motives of self-interest or expediency, which her husband occasionally suggested to her. For this lavish, frank-spoken, open-hearted young Celt had also the true Celtic characteristic of never being blind to his own interests. Careless as he was, he knew quite well on which side his bread was buttered; and under all his reckless generosity lay a stratum of meanness: which indeed is generally found a necessary adjunct to the aforesaid qualities.

He noticed his wife's silence: at which his sensitive love of approbation—to call it by a lighter name than vanity—immediately took offense.

"You think that was a wrong thing of me to say? But you always do find fault with any new ideas of mine. You would like every thing to originate with yourself!"

Josephine answered only the first half of his sentence. "I think it wrong to 'cultivate' any body for the sake of what you can get out of him. And you know the proverb, 'It's ill waiting for dead men's shoes.'"

"But how can one help it when one has to go barefoot?"

"Which is not exactly our case, Edward. We have as much as we require; and we need not be beholden to any man—thank God!"

"You are thankful for small mercies," said Edward Scanlan, bitterly—very bitterly for a clergyman. "But, putting aside the future, don't you think Mr. Oldham might do something for us at present, if he knew we wanted help? For instance, last Sunday, in the vestry, he was preaching to me a little extra sermon about César, noticing what a big boy he was growing, and asking me what I intended to do with him—when he was to go to school, and where? Rather impertinent interference, I thought."

"He meant it well," said Mrs. Scanlan, humbly, and with averted eyes: afraid of betraying in any way the comfort it was to find out that the rector was not indifferent to a fact which had haunted herself for many cruel weeks—how her handsome, manly César was growing up in a state of rough ignorance, lamentable in any gentleman's son, and especially

to be deplored in one who might have to fill a good position in society, where he would one day bitterly feel every defect in education.

"Meant well? Oh, of course a rector is always supposed to mean well toward a curate, or the poor curate is obliged to take it so, as I shall. But my idea was this: that since he is so anxious that the lad should be well educated—which we can not possibly afford—perhaps, if the matter were cleverly put before him—and you have such a clever way of doing things, dearest—Mr. Oldham might send César to school himself."

Josephine started. "I do not quite understand you," she said.

No—sometimes she really did not understand her husband. She found herself making egregious mistakes concerning him and his motives. To put a most sad thing in a ludicrous light (as how often do we not do in this world?) her position was like that of the great cat trying to get through the little cat's hole: her large nature was perpetually at fault in calculating the smallness of his.

"Not understand! Why, Josephine, the thing is as plain as a pikestaff. Don't you see how much we should save if Mr. Oldham could be induced to send César to school at his own expense? It is no uncommon thing. Many a rich man has done it for a poor man's son, who turned out a credit to him afterward: as César might, and then the obligation would be rather on Mr. Oldham's side, in my having consented to the thing. Indeed," growing warmer as he argued, "it would be a very good thing on both sides. And I could then afford to pay that visit to London which Summerhayes is always bothering me about, and considers would be such an advantage to myself and the family."

Still Josephine was silent; but her face clouded over and hardened into the expression which her husband knew well enough, and was in his secret heart a little afraid of. He was thus far a good fellow—he respected and loved his good wife very sincerely.

"I see you don't like either of these notions of mine, my dear, especially about César. You know Mr. Oldham pretty well, perhaps even better than I do. If you think he would take offense at such a hint—"

"I should never dream of hinting any thing to Mr. Oldham. If I wanted to ask of him a kindness I should ask it direct, and I believe he would grant it. But to beg from him indirectly the help which we do not really need—"

"We do need it. César must go to school. I want to go to London. And we can't do both, you say."

"No we can not. It is impossible. But it is equally impossible for us to accept favors, or to beg for any, from Mr. Oldham."

"So you say, but I entirely differ from you. It is no favor: the laborer is worthy of his hire."

"And the beggar is worthy of both his kicks

and his half-pence. But, Edward, I will take neither. You know my mind. Many a free, honest, honorable kindness may one man have to owe to another, and both be benefited thereby; but to ask from another any thing that by any amount of personal sacrifice one could do for one's self is a meanness I have not been used to. My father never would stoop to it, nor shall my son."

Quietly as she said them, they were stinging words: such as she could use on occasions. She was not a stupid woman, nor a tame woman; and in her youth the "soft answer," which is often woman's best strength, did not always come. She was fierce against wrong rather than patient with it—outraged and indignant where it might have been wiser to be quietly brave. Though not too thin-skinned, ordinarily, to-day her husband winced as if she had been whipping him with nettles. For he knew what an idol Josephine's father had been to her, and how well the noble old nobleman had deserved that worship. Poor Edward Scanlan was a little cowed even before the dim ghost of the dead Vicomte de Bougainville.

"Your father—your son. Then your husband may do any thing he chooses? You won't care. He, of course, is quite an inferior being."

"Edward, hush! The child!"

For Adrienne had put her tiny pale face in at the bedroom door, outside which she often hovered like an anxious spirit when her father and mother were talking.

"The child may hear it all," said Mr. Scanlan, glad to escape from a difficulty. "Look here, Adrienne; the difference between your mother and me is this: I want you to go to the Rectory to-morrow—she wishes to take you to the farm; which should you like best?"

The perplexed child looked from one parent to the other. "I thought, papa, you did not care for Mr. Oldham; you are always finding fault with him, or laughing at him."

"What a sharp child it is!" said Mr. Scanlan, extremely amused. "Never mind, Adrienne, whether I like Mr. Oldham or not; I wish you to go and see him whenever he asks you: and always be sure to pay him particular attention, for he may be very useful to both me and my family."

"Yes, papa," replied innocent Adrienne, though not without a shy glance at her mother for assent and approval.

The mother stepped forward, pale and firm, but with a fierce light glittering in her eyes:

"Yes, Adrienne, I too wish you to pay Mr. Oldham all proper attention, because he is a good man who has heaped us all with kindnesses; because, though we will never ask any more from him, we can not show sufficient gratitude for those we have already received. Therefore, since papa particularly desires it, we will give up the farm and go to the Rectory."

"Thank you, my dearest; you are very good," said Edward Scanlan, quite satisfied and mollified; and on leaving the room he went over to

his wife and kissed her. She received the kiss, but let him depart without a word.

Then, taking off her bonnet, Josephine put it by, mechanically rolling up the strings—a habit she had to make them last the longer—and did various other things about her drawers in an absent sort of way—never noticing the childish eyes which followed her every motion. But always silently—Adrienne was such a very quiet child. Not until the mother sat down on the bedside, and put her hands over her dry, hot eyes, with a heavy sigh, did she feel her little daughter creeping behind her, to clasp around her neck cool, soft arms.

“Maman, maman”—the French version of the word, with the slight French accentuation of the first syllable, such as her children generally used when they petted her.

Mrs. Scanlan turned round and hid her forehead on the little bosom—leaving a wet place where her eyes had lain on the coarse blue pinafore.

She said nothing to Adrienne, of course; and henceforth she carefully avoided naming to her husband the subject of César’s going to school. But she made up her mind when it should be done, and how, during those ten silent minutes in her bedroom. And from that day the idea of asking Mr. Oldham’s permission to tell her husband of their future prospects altogether passed from her mind. No; the rector was right in his judgment: she herself was the only safe depositary of the secret. She locked it closer than ever in her heart, and returned to her old solitude of spirit—the worst of all solitudes—that which does not appear outside.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. SCANLAN went to London. How he went is by no means clear; but I rather suspect it was through a pearl brooch, which a rich and warm-hearted bride, just going out to India—a neighbor’s daughter—greatly desiderated, and purchased. At any rate, it came about somehow that Josephine’s purse was full, her jewel-case rather empty, and that her husband took his jaunt to the metropolis—a pleasure which he had longed for ever since Mr. Summerhayes began his yearly visits to Ditchley and the neighborhood.

I do not want to depict this Mr. Summerhayes in villainous colors, with horns and a tail. I believe the very personage who owns those appendages may be not quite as black as he is painted, still I do not agree with those novel writers who will not call a spade a spade—who make us interested in murder, lenient toward bigamy, and amused with swindling, provided only it be picturesque. There does not seem to me such a wide distinction between the vulgar man who steals a leg of mutton or a loaf of bread, and the “gentle” man—let me not profane the word “gentleman”—who dines luxuriously, but never thinks of paying his

butcher or baker; who, however deficient his income, lives always at ease, upon money borrowed from friends or kindred, with promise of speedy return. But it never is returned—was never meant to be; and the man, however charming he may be, is neither more nor less than a thief and a liar, and ought to be scouted by society as such. And till society has the courage to do it—to strip the fine feathers from these fine birds, and show them in their ugly barenness, mean as any crop-headed convict in Pentonville Prison—so long will the world be cumbered with them and the miseries they cause. Not to themselves: *they* never suffer, often flourishing on like green bay-trees to the end, or almost the end; but to other and most innocent people, who unhappily belong to them, and perhaps even love them.

Mr. Summerhayes was one of these, and he became the evil genius of Mr. Scanlan’s life. Though younger than the curate, he was a great deal older in many things from his superior knowledge of the world. They sympathized in their tastes, and each found the other very convenient and amusing company, when, year by year, Summerhayes made his sketching tour round the beautiful neighborhood of Ditchley. There were great differences between them—for instance, the elder man was weak and pliable, the younger cool-headed and determined; the Irishman possessed a fragment of a heart and the ghost of a conscience—the Englishman had neither. On many points, however, they were much alike—with enough dissimilarity to make their companionship mutually agreeable and amusing. And as in both the grand aim of life was to be amused, they got on together remarkably well. Nay, in his own way, Edward Scanlan was really quite fond of “my friend Summerhayes.”

So was César, for a while; so was Adrienne—with the intense admiration that an imaginative child sometimes conceives for a young man, clever, brilliant, beautiful, godlike; in so much that the mother was rather sorry to see it, and stopped as soon as she could without observation the constant petting which the artist bestowed, summer after summer, upon his little girl-slave, who followed him about with eyes as loving as a spaniel dog. This year, when he succeeded in carrying off their father, the two children envied papa exceedingly, scarcely so much for the pleasures of London as for the permanent society of Mr. Summerhayes.

This, however, he did not get, as he soon found himself obliged to “cut” his friend, and the set the artist belonged to—which, in spite of their irreligious Bohemianism, the curate liked extremely—for the sake of reviving his own former acquaintances, who had come up to attend the May meetings in Exeter Hall, and who were of a class, aristocratic and clerical, who looked down upon painters, poets, and such like, as devotees to the world, the flesh, and the devil—and besides not exactly “respectable.” Mr. Scanlan had to choose

between them, and he did so—externally; but he nevertheless contrived to serve two masters, in a way that excited the amusement and loudly-expressed admiration of Mr. Summerhayes.

Often, after being late up overnight, in places which Exeter Hall could never have even heard of, and which, to do him justice, the innocent curate of Ditchley knew as little about as any young lamb of his fold—only Summerhayes asked him to go, and he went—after this he would appear at religious breakfasts, given by evangelical Earls, and pious Duchesses dowager; where he would hold forth for hours, delighted to see reviving his former popularity. This did not happen immediately. At first he found the memories of even the best friends grew dulled after seven years' absence; but many were kind to him still. The exceeding sincerity and single-heartedness often found, then as now, among the evangelical party—making them associate alike with rich and poor, patrician and plebeian—any one who, like themselves, holds what they believe to be “the Gospel”—stood Edward Scanlan in good stead.

After he had succeeded in making a platform speech—full of the Beast with seven heads and ten horns, the Woman in scarlet, and other favorite allegories by which, in that era of Catholic Emancipation struggles, the Orange party always designated the Romish Church—many of his old admirers rallied round the once popular preacher. But he was in London—not Dublin—and had to deal with cool-headed Englishmen, not impulsive Hibernians. Though his former friends had not forgotten him, and were very glad to see him, still he was no longer “the rage,” as he once had been. His blossoming season had a little gone by. He hung his head, “like a lily drooping,” before those full-blown orators who now mounted the rostrum, and discoursed on the topics of the day with an energy and a power which carried all before them, because they had a quality which the brilliant Irishman somewhat lacked—earnestness.

Of all places, London is the one where people find their level; where only under peculiar circumstances, and never for very long, is gilding mistaken for gold. The Church of England was beginning to pass out of that stage which the present generation may still remember—when the humdrum sermons of the last century were, by a natural reaction, replaced by the “flowery” style of preaching; now, in its turn, also on the decline. Names, Irish and English—which it would be invidious here to record, but which were fondly familiar to the religious world of that date—were a little losing their charm, and their owners their popularity. Mere “words, words, words,” however eloquently arranged and passionately delivered, were felt not to be enough. Something more real, more substantial, was craved for by the hungry seekers after truth—who had brains to understand, as

well as hearts to love—besides the usual cant requirement of “souls to be saved.”

For such vital necessities the provender given by Mr. Scanlan and similar preachers was but poor diet. Vivid pictures of death and the grave, painted with such ghastly accuracy that it was no uncommon circumstance for poor women in fresh mourning weeds to be carried out fainting into the vestry; glowing descriptions of heaven, and horrible ones of hell, as minute and decisive as if the reverend gentleman had lately visited both regions, and come back to speak of them from personal observation—sermons of this sort did not quite satisfy the churchgoers of the metropolis, even in the month of May, and amidst all the ardors of Exeter Hall. No—not though backed by the still handsome appearance and Irish fluency—which so often passed current for eloquence—of the curate of Ditchley. Many people asked who Mr. Scanlan was, and lamented, especially to his face, that he should be “thrown away” in such a far-distant parish; but nobody offered him a living, a proprietary chapel, or even a common curacy. And he found out that the inducements and advices held out by Mr. Summerhayes on the subject were mere random talk, upon a matter concerning which the artist knew nothing. He had urged Scanlan’s coming up to London with the careless good-nature which they both possessed; but now that he was there he found his guest rather a bore, and, in degree, turned the cold shoulder upon him. Between his two sets of friends, artistic and religious, it sometimes happened that the poor curate had nowhere to resort to, and spent more than one lonely evening in crowded, busy London; which caused him to write home doleful letters to his wife, saying how he missed her, and how glad he should be to return to her. These letters filled her heart with rejoicing.

And when he did come back, a little crest-fallen, and for the first day or so not talking much about his journey, she received him gladly and tenderly. But she rejoiced nevertheless. It was one of the sad things in Josephine’s life that her husband’s discomfiture was, necessarily, oftentimes to her a source of actual thankfulness. Not that she did not feel for his disappointment, and grieve over it in her heart, but she was glad he had found out his mistake. Her conscience was never deluded by her affections. She would as soon have led her boy César over ice an eighth of an inch thick, as have aided her husband in any thing where she knew the attainment of his wish would be to his own injury.

Nevertheless, when he came home—worn and irritable, fatigued with London excitements, which were such a contrast to his ordinary quiet life, and none the better for various dissipations to which he had not the power to say No—Mrs. Scanlan was very sorry for him, and tried to make Wren’s Nest as pleasant as possible to him, supplying him, so far as she could, with all his pet luxuries, listening to his endless

egotistical talk about the sensation he had created in London, and, above all, accepting patiently a heap of presents, more ornamental than useful, which she afterward discovered he had purchased with money borrowed from Mr. Summerhayes, and which, with other extraneous expenses, caused this London journey to amount to much more than the pearl brooch would cover. And César had already gone to school; Louis too—for the brothers pined so at being separated. At school they must be kept, poor boys! cost what it would.

Many a night did their mother lie awake, planning ways and means which it was useless to talk of to her Edward. In fact, she had very much given up speaking of late: she found it did no good, and only irritated her temper, and confused her sense of right and wrong. She generally thought out things by herself, and mentioned nothing aloud until it was fully matured in her own mind. One plan, which had occurred to her several times since the day when Mr. Scanlan satirically suggested that she should apply for a clerk's situation, and she had replied bitterly, "I wish I could!" finally settled itself into a fixed scheme—that of earning money herself, independent of her husband. For that more money must be earned, somehow and by somebody, was now quite plain.

To the last generation the idea of women working for their daily bread was new, and somewhat repellent. First, because it was a much rarer necessity then than now. Society was on a simpler footing. Women did work—in a sense—but it was within, not without the house: keeping fewer servants, dressing less extravagantly, and lightening the load of husbands and fathers by helping to save rather than to spend. There were more girls married, because men were not afraid to marry them; young fellows chose their wives as helpmates, instead of ornamental excrescences or appendages—expensive luxuries which should be avoided as long as possible. Consequently there were fewer families cast adrift on the world—helpless mothers and idle, thriftless sisters thrown on the charity of kindred, who have their own household to work for, and naturally think it hard to be burdened with more.

But, on the other hand, the feeling, begun in chivalrous tenderness, though degenerating to a mere superstition, that it is not "respectable" for a woman to maintain herself, was much more general than now. And the passionate "I wish I could!" of poor Josephine Scanlan had been a mere outcry of pain, neither caused by, nor resulting in, any definite purpose. Gradually, however, the purpose came, and from a mere nebulous desire resolved itself into a definite plan.

She saw clearly that if, during the years that might elapse before her wealth came—years, the end of which she dared not look for, it seemed like wishing for Mr. Oldham's death—the family was to be maintained in any comfort, she must work as well as her husband.

At first this was a blow to her. It ran counter to all the prejudices in which she had been reared; it smote her with a nameless pain. What would her father have said?—the proud old nobleman, who thought his nobility not disgraced by becoming a teacher of languages, and even of dancing—any thing that could earn for him an honest livelihood; who would have worked unceasingly himself, but never have allowed his daughter to work. Poor as they were, until her marriage Josephine had been the closely shut up and tenderly guarded *Mademoiselle de Bougainville*. But Mrs. Scanlan was, and long had been, quite another person. Nobody guarded her! Remembering her own old self, sometimes she could have laughed, sometimes rather wept.

But of that, and of a few other sad facts, her father had died in happy ignorance, and she was free. She must work—and she would do it.

But how? There lay the difficulty, greater then than even in our day. A generation ago no one supposed a woman in the rank of a lady could do any thing but teach children. Teaching, therefore, was the first thing Mrs. Scanlan thought of; but the scheme had many objections. For one reason, she was far from well-educated, and, marrying at sixteen, the little education she ever had would have soon slipped away, save for the necessity of being her children's instructress. She learned in order to teach; sometimes keeping only a short distance ahead of the little flock, who, however, being fortunately impressed with the firm belief that mamma knew every thing, followed her implicitly, step by step, especially the little girls. But even the boys, fragmentary as their education was, had been found at school not half so ignorant as she had expected; every thing they knew they knew thoroughly. So the master said, and this comforted their mother, and emboldened her to try if she could not find other little boys and girls about Ditchley to teach with Adrienne, Gabrielle, and Martin. Very little children, of course, for she was too honest to take them without telling their parents the whole truth, that she had never been brought up as a governess, and could only teach them as she had taught her own.

Gradually, in a quiet way, she found out who among the rising generation of Ditchley would be likely to come to her, as the mistress of a little day-school, to be held in the parlor at Wren's Nest, or in any other parlor that might be offered to her; and then, all her information gained and her plans laid, she prepared herself for what she considered a mere form, the broaching of the subject to her husband.

To her surprise it met with violent opposition.

"Keep a school! My wife keep a school!"—Edward Scanlan was horrified.

"Why should I not keep a school? am I not clever enough?" said she, smiling. "Nevertheless, I managed to get some credit for teaching my boys, and now that they are away my time is free, and I should like to use it; be-

sides," added she, seriously, "it will be better for us that I should use it. We want more money."

"You are growing perfectly insane, I think, on the subject of money," cried the curate, in much irritation. "If we are running short, why not go again to Mr. Oldham and ask him for more, as I have so often suggested your doing?"

Ay, he had, till by force of repetition he had ceased to feel shame or indignation. But the suggestion was never carried out, for she set herself against it with a dull persistence, hard and silent as a rock, and equally invincible.

Taking no notice of her husband's last remark—for where was the good of wasting words?—she began quietly to reason with him about his dislike to her setting up a school.

"Where can be the harm of it? Why should I not help to earn the family bread? You work hard, Edward." ("That I do," he cried, eagerly.) "Why should not I work too? It would make me happier, and there is no disgrace in it."

"There is. What lady ever works? Shopkeepers' wives may help their husbands, but in our rank of life the husband labors only; the wife sits at home and enjoys herself, as you do."

"Do I?", said Josephine, with a queer sort of smile. But she attempted not to retouch this very imaginative picture. Her husband would never have understood it. "But I do not wish to enjoy myself; I had rather help you and the children. Nor can I see any real reason why I should not do it."

"Possibly not; you have such odd ideas sometimes. If I were a tradesman you could carry them out; stand behind the counter selling a pound of tea and a yard of tape, calculating every half-penny, and putting it all by—which I dare say you would much enjoy, and be quite in your element. But my wife—a clergyman's wife—could not possibly so degrade herself."

"Why, Edward, what nonsense! Many a clergyman's widow has turned schoolmistress."

"As my widow, you may; as my wife, never! I would not endure it. To come home and find you overrun by a troop of horrid brats, never having a minute to spare for me; it would be intolerable. Besides, what would Ditchley say?"

"I do not know, and—excuse me, Edward—I do not very much care."

"But you ought to care. It is most important that I keep up my position, and that Ditchley should not know my exact circumstances. Why, the other day, when somebody was talking about how well we managed with our large family, I heard it said—'Of course Mr. Scanlan must have, besides his curacy, a private fortune.'"

"And you let that pass? You allowed our neighbors to believe it?"

"Why should I not? It made them think

all the better of me. But, my dear, I fear I never shall get you to understand the necessity of keeping up appearances."

"I am afraid not," said Josephine, slowly. "Perhaps we had better quit the subject. Once again, Edward, will you give me your consent, the only thing I need, and without which I can not carry out my plans? They are so very simple, so harmless, so entirely for your own benefit and that of the family."

And in her desperation she did what of late she had rather given up doing: she began to reason and even to plead with her husband. But once again, for the hundredth time, she found herself at fault concerning him. She had not calculated on the excessive obstinacy which often coexists with weakness. A strong man can afford to change his mind, to see the force of arguments and yield to them, but a weak person is afraid to give in. "I've said it, and I'll stick to it," is his only castle of defense, in which he intrenches himself against all assaults; unless indeed his opponent is cunning enough to take and lead him by the nose with the invisible halter of his own vanity and selfishness. But such a course this woman—all honest-minded women—would have scorned.

Mrs. Scanlan found her husband, in his own mild and good-natured way, quite impracticable. He had taken it into his head that it was not "genteel" for a woman to work, especially a married woman; so, work his wife should not, whatever happened.

"Not in any way, visible or invisible?" said she, with a slight touch of satire in her tone. "And is this charming idleness to be for my own sake or yours?"

"For both, my dear; I am sure I am right. Think how odd it would look, Mrs. Scanlan keeping a school! If you had proposed to earn money in some quiet way, which our neighbors would never find out—"

"You would not have objected to that?" said Josephine, eagerly.

"Very likely I might; but still not so much. However, I am quite tired of discussing this matter. For once, Josephine, you must give in. As I have so often to remind you, the husband is the head of the wife, and when I do choose to assert my authority— However, we will not enter upon that question. Just leave me to earn the money, and you stay quietly at home and enjoy yourself, like other wives, and be very thankful that you have a husband to provide for you. Depend upon it this is the ordinance of Scripture, which says that marriage is a great mystery."

"Yes," muttered Josephine, turning away with that flash of the eye that showed she was not exactly a tame creature to be led or driven, but a wild creature, tied and bound, that felt keenly, perhaps dangerously, the careless hand dragging at her chain.

Most truly, marriage was a mystery—to her. Why had Heaven mocked her with the sham of a husband? ordered her to obey him, who was



"MARRIAGE IS A GREAT MYSTERY."

too weak to rule? to honor him, whom, had he been a stranger, she would in many things have actually despised? to love him?—ah! there was the sharpest torture of her bonds. She had loved him once, and in a sort of way she loved him still. That wonderful, piteous habit of loving—the affection which lingers long after all passion has died, and respect been worn out—which one sees in the beggared peeress who will not accept the remedy the law gives her, and part forever from her faithless, spendthrift, brutal lord: in the coster-monger's wife, who comes bleeding and maimed to the police-office, yet will not swear the peace against the savage she calls husband—nay, will rather perjure herself than have him punished—God knows there must be something divine in this feeling which He has implanted in women's breasts, and which they never fully understand until they are married.

I did not; and I have often marveled at, sometimes even blamed, this Josephine Scanlan, whose little finger was worth more than her husband's whole body, that to the end of his days, and her days, she cherished a strange tenderness for the man to whom she had been bound by the closest tie that human nature can know.

Some chance interrupted their conversation at this critical point, and before she could get an opportunity of reviving it—for Mr. Scanlan shirked the subject in every possible way—she thought over the question, and arranged it in her own mind in a different form.

To go directly counter to her husband was impossible, and to yield to him equally so. That charming picture of domestic life with which he deluded himself would result in leaving their children without bread. Certainly the father earned money, but he spent it as fast as he earned it, in that easy, Irish fashion he had, which his poor old mother knew so well! As to how it was spent nobody quite knew; but nobody seemed any the better for it. That creed, fortunately not a true one, which I once heard nobly enunciated by a stout father of a family, "that a married man must always sacrifice himself to either wife or children," did not number among its votaries the Rev. Edward Scanlan.

His wife must earn money; she knew that, but she thought she would take him at his word, and try to do it, as he said—"in some quiet way." And suddenly a way suggested itself, after the curious fashion in which the bread we cast upon the waters is taken up again after many days.

The woman who had been nurse to unhappy Mr. Waters, overwhelmed by the fatal termination of her duties in this case, gave up her vocation as attendant on the insane; and, being a clever and sensible person, started a little shop for ladies' and children's clothes, lace cleaning and mending, and other things for which the wealthy families hereabout had hitherto required to send to London. She prospered well—not unhelped by advice from her good friend Mrs. Scanlan, whose exquisite

French taste, and French skill in lace and embroidery work, had never quite deserted her. In her need, Josephine thought whether she could not do for money what she used to do for pleasure. Priscilla Nunn always wanted "hands," which were most difficult to find. Why should not the curate's wife offer herself as "first hand," doing the work at her own home, and if possible "under the rose"—that flower which must have been chosen as the emblem of secrecy because it has so many thorns?

So had Mrs. Scanlan's scheme: but once again, as in that well-remembered mission to the Rectory, she took her courage *dans ses deux mains*, as her father would have said, and went to speak to Priscilla.

It was not so very hard after all. She was asking no favor; she knew she could give fair work for honest pay, and she did not feel degraded; not half so degraded as when—owing money to six shops in High Street—she had walked down Mr. Oldham's garden on that summer day which now seemed half a lifetime ago.

Priscilla was, of course, much astonished, but the quickness and delicacy of perception essential to one who had followed her melancholy *métier* for so many years, prevented her betraying this to the lady who wanted to work like a shop girl. She readily accepted the offer, and promised not to make the facts public if Mrs. Scanlan wished them concealed.

"You kept my secret once, ma'am," she said, "and I'll keep yours now. Not a soul in Ditchley shall find it out. I'll tell all my ladies I send my work to be done in London."

"Don't do that, pray! Never tell a falsehood on my account, it would make me miserable. And besides, for myself I don't care who knows; only my husband."

"I see, ma'am. Well, then, I'll tell no stories; only just keep the matter to myself, which I can easily do. I am accustomed to hold my tongue; and, besides, I've nobody to speak to. Thank goodness!" she added, with a shrewd acerbity, that half amazed, half pained Mrs. Scanlan—"Thank goodness, ma'am, I've got no husband."

So the matter was decided, and the curate's wife took home with her a packet of valuable lace, which occupied her for many weeks, and brought her in quite a handful of money. Often it amused her extremely to see her handiwork upon her various neighbors, and to hear it admired, and herself congratulated as being the means of inducing Priscilla Nunn to settle at Ditchley—such an advantage to the ladies of the neighborhood.

Her faithful Bridget, and her fond little daughter Adrienne, of course, soon found out her innocent mystery; but it was a good while before her husband guessed it. He was so accustomed to see her always at work that he never thought of asking questions. When at last he did, and she told him what she was do-

ing, and why, he was a little vexed at first; but he soon got over it.

"A very lady-like employment," said he, touching the delicate fabric over which her eyes were straining themselves many hours a day. "And it keeps you a good deal within doors, which is much more proper than trailing every where with the children, as you used to do. And you are certain nobody has the slightest idea of your earning money?"

"Quite certain."

"Well, then, do as you like, my dear. You are a very clever woman, the cleverest woman I ever knew, and the most fitted to be my wife."

It did not occur to him was he most fitted to be her husband? He took this side of the question with a satisfied complaisance beautiful to behold.

But to her it mattered little. She did not weigh minutely the balance of things. She was doing her duty both to him and the children, and that was enough for her. Especially when, after a time, she found her provision more needful than she had expected; since there would ere long be seven little mouths to feed instead of six. She was not exactly a young woman now, and the cry, "My strength faileth me!" was often on her lips. Never audibly, however; or nobody heard it but Bridget. But still ever and anon came the terror which had once before beset her—of dying, and leaving her children to the sole charge of their father. And the restlessness which ever since his journey to London had come upon Edward Scanlan at times, the murmurs that he was "not appreciated at Ditchley," that he was "wasting his life," "rusting his talents," and so on, tried her more than any sufferings of her own.

Another sketch which just at this time Mr. Summerhayes took of her—Mr. Summerhayes, who still found it convenient and agreeable to come to Ditchley every summer, making his head-quarters within a walk of Wren's Nest, the hospitable doors of which were never shut against him by his good friend the curate, who would forgive any shortcomings for the sake of enjoying "intellectual" society—this portrait has, stronger than ever, the anxious look which, idealized, only added to the charm of Josephine's beauty, but in real life must have been rather painful to behold. She sat for it, I believe, under the impression that it might possibly be the last remembrance of her left to her children—but Providence willed otherwise.

She labored as long and as hard as she could to provide for the reception of this youngest child, welcome still, though, as Mr. Scanlan once said, "rather inconvenient;" and then, quite suddenly, her trial came upon her: she laid herself down, uncertain whether she should ever rise up more. When she did, it was alone. That corner of Ditchley church-yard which she called *her* grave—for two of her infants lay there—had to be opened in the moon-

light to receive a third tiny coffin, buried at night, without any funeral rites, as unchristened babies are—babies that have only breathed for a minute this world's sharp air, and whom nobody thinks much of, except their mothers, who often grieve over them as if they had been living children.

But this mother, strange to say, did not grieve. When Bridget told her all about the poor little thing—for she had been unconscious at the time of its birth, and her head “wandered” for several days afterward, in consequence, her servant angrily believed, of some “botherations” of Mr. Scanlan’s which he talked to his wife about, when any husband of common-sense would have held his tongue—Josephine looked in Bridget’s face with a strange, wistful smile.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry; it is better as it is. My poor little girl! It was a girl? And she was very like me, you say? Did her father see her at all?”

“Can’t tell,” replied Bridget, abruptly.

“Never mind; we’ll not fret. My little lamb! she is safer away. There is one woman less in the world to suffer. I am content she died.”

And when Mrs. Scanlan was seen again in her customary household place, and going about her usual duties, there was indeed a solemn content, even thankfulness in her face. She never had another child.

CHAPTER VIII.

DURING the sad domestic interregnum, when she had the law entirely in her own hands, Bridget Halloran, with her usual acuteness, stimulated by her passionate fidelity, did not fail to discover the whole length and breadth of the “botheration” which, she firmly believed, had been the cause of the all but fatal termination of her dear mistress’s illness. And the root of it was that root of all bitterness in Wren’s Nest—Mr. Summerhayes.

Mrs. Scanlan disapproved of him in a passive, though reticent and unobnoxious way, but Bridget cordially hated Mr. Summerhayes. Perhaps he had betrayed himself more carelessly to the servant than he did before the lady, unto whom he was always exceedingly courteous; perhaps, human nature being weak, Bridget had taken umbrage at things the children let out concerning his ridicule of her ugliness and her rough odd ways; or, more likely, he had rivaled her a while in the affections of that little flock, who were the idols of her fond and jealous heart. At any rate, there was secretly war to the knife between the servant and her master’s friend, whom Bridget believed, and not without reason, to be any thing but the friend of her mistress and the family. Possibly, though she never said it, the mistress thought the same.

It may be urged that a true and loving wife

has no cause to dread any other influence—certainly not any male influence—over her husband: none can possibly be so strong as her own. But this must depend greatly upon what sort of man the husband may be. If he is a mere weather-cock, blown about by every wind, she has much reason to be careful from which quarter the wind blows. The influence which Summerhayes gained over Mr. Scanlan was exactly that which a strong bad man can always exercise over an amiable weak one—taking him on his weakest side, and leading him by means of his tastes, his follies, or his prejudices. This was apparent even to the inexperienced eyes of Bridget Halloran. She—good, ignorant woman!—had never seen that wonderful engraving of Satan playing with the young man for his soul, or she would have likened her master to one of the players, and his friend to the other; while in the sorrowful angel who stands behind, striving to the last for the possession of that poor fool who is perhaps hardly worth striving for, she would at once have seen another likeness, another good angel, such a one as few men have, or similar struggles might not end as they so often do—in blank defeat.

The contest must have been sore on the day before Mrs. Scanlan was taken ill. It seemed Mr. Summerhayes had “got into difficulties”—to use the mild term in which society puts such things; in fact, he was flying from his creditors, who had at last risen up indignant against the fascinating gentleman who for years had played a deep game of deception with them all. There are some people who, more than even being wronged, abhor being made a fool of, and two or three of these pursued relentlessly the man of fashion who, after cheating them in every possible way, had tried to free himself from them by calling his art a trade, and by some legal chicanery making himself a bankrupt instead of an insolvent. He had been some days in hiding, and then, driven to the last extremity, implored to be hidden at Wren’s Nest.

This Mrs. Scanlan steadfastly withheld. Perhaps she might have sheltered a noble traitor, but a “thief”—as she very plainly put it—had no interest in her eyes. She was deaf to all her husband’s arguments, entreaties, threats; she declared positively the swindler should not enter her doors; but the resistance nearly cost her her life.

These facts Bridget ingeniously discovered, and the consequence was that one day, when, taking advantage of the forlorn state of the garrison, Mr. Summerhayes appeared, he had the door shut in his face, and was summarily taken possession of by the enemy—a wolf in sheep’s clothing who had tracked him safely to Ditchley. The law caught hold of him, and consigned him to the jail which, in Bridget’s opinion, he richly deserved. Possibly, had he been an Irishman and her friend, she might have thought differently, and have resisted rather



ADRIENNE.

than abetted "the powers that be"—for poor Bridget's heart always had clearer vision than her head; but being what he was, and she what she was, he found with her no mercy, only stern justice. Bridget triumphed over her victim like Jael over Sisera, with a righteous triumph, which she did not fail to betray to the only one to whom she could betray it—poor little Miss Adrienne, who listened and wept! For the child was growing up into a maiden of fourteen, and the only hero in her life had been this young man, so clever, so handsome, viewed with reverence as well as admiration, being so many years older than herself. Hapless Adrienne! already she could not bear to have a word said to the disparagement of Mr. Summerhayes.

Bridget shut the door upon him; and her master, when he found it out, was furious. Even her mistress thought the thing might have been done more gently, and was rather glad when, by some loophole of justice, the artist crept out of his durance vile and escaped abroad, where by nothing worse than letters could he attack her husband. And when, gradually, on her complaining a little of them, and their constant hints for assistance, the letters ceased, her spirits revived. She thought if this baleful influence were once removed from Edward Scanlan's life her own life might become brighter. For she loved brightness, this sorely-tried woman. She never lingered a moment longer than she could help under the fringe of the cloud.

One small shadow, however, that cloud left

behind for long. Mr. Scanlan's dislike to Bridget increased every day. Her ugliness and roughness had always been an annoyance to him; but the worst thing was that she, with her sharp eyes, had long ago seen through "the master," and no man likes to be seen through, especially by his servants.

Besides, Bridget's passionate devotion to "the mistress" caused her to make perpetual and not always silent protest against things which Mrs. Scanlan herself bore with perfect equanimity, for long habit scarcely even notices them—small daily sacrifices; which an unselfish nature is perpetually offering to a selfish one, and a woman to a man—whether for his good is not always clear. And Bridget, being an inveterate man-hater, resented this.

Unquestionably, Bridget could not have been always a pleasant person to have in the house. She was a special bugbear to Edward Scanlan, with whom her warm Irish heart counted as nothing against her sharp Irish tongue, edged with shrewd mother-wit, and weighted by the sterling honesty which detects at once any thing like a sham. He not merely disliked her, he actually dreaded her, and tried every means, not open, but underhand, to get rid of her. They all failed, however. When she left Ireland Bridget had declared she would live and die with her dear mistress, and she kept her word. She stuck like a bur to the struggling household at Wren's Nest, blind to all hints, deaf to all scoldings—totally indifferent on the subject of wages, or of "bettering herself," as

her master sometimes urged. She would not go; and both she and her mistress knew perfectly well that she could not go. For what new servant would have been content with Bridget's wages—have lived upon Bridget's scanty fare—have put up with every sort of inconvenience, and still gone working on “like a horse,” as Bridget did? Above all, who would have loved them—one and all—as Bridget loved them?

And in this story, where I am conscious of shooting many a sharp arrow against the Irish nation—casting dust—ah, well!—on the graves of my children's forefathers—let me confess with tears over another grave, where I myself lately laid Bridget Halloran's dear old head, that I believe she is not an untrue type of many Irishwomen—women carrying under their light, lively manners hearts as true as steel, and as pure and fresh as their own green meadows and blue skies—cheerful themselves and cheering others to the last limit of a blessed old age. I have known such; and I wish—oh! my sincere, formal, dear, gentle Englishwomen; my brave, true, narrow-minded, large-hearted Scotchwomen—I wish I knew a few more!

The whole course of Bridget's relations with the family of which she considered herself a member were a queer mixture of tragedy and comedy, which climaxed to a point when there appeared unexpectedly a quite legitimate mode of getting rid of her. The Rectory gardener—an elderly widower, with a large family—who had long noted Bridget's good qualities, balanced them against her defects; and having very deaf ears and no eye for beauty, considered that she would make him a capital wife. Accordingly he asked her formally in marriage, and of Mr. Scanlan, who, with great amazement and ill-concealed satisfaction, forwarded the old fellow's suit by every means in his power.

But Bridget refused to smile upon her ancient lover—not that his antiquity was against him: she said, “Old men were much better than young ones; she'd rather marry the rector than any curate in the neighborhood, if she was a lady. But,” she added, severely, “not a man in the world was to be depended on; she'd seen too much of matrimony to wish to try it herself.” Which remark, being repeated to him unconsciously by one of his “little pitchers,” who have always such proverbially “long ears,” did not greatly gratify Mr. Scanlan.

I fear he may be considered, after all, an ill-used man, playing a rather subordinate part in his own household. But people get what they can; and there is one thing which no sham reverence will impart to its object—dignity. It is no easy thing to set up as the household deity an idol, not of gold but clay, from whom the gilding is perpetually rubbing off, and the baser material appearing in the eyes even of children and servants; so that nothing but the assertion of an absolute falsehood can maintain the head of the family as a “head” at all. Oh how

thankful ought those families to be who really have a head to worship—with the leal devotion which is his rightful due—who, as husband, father, and master, righteously fulfills his duties, and is in truth God's vicegerent upon earth unto those who with all their hearts love, honor, and obey him! Knowing what such loyalty is, it is with tears rather than wrath or ridicule that I draw this inevitable picture of Edward Scanlan.

He was a very unfortunate man, and thought himself so, though for other causes than the true ones. He counted as nothing his bright, clever, handsome wife, his healthy children, his settled income, but was always wearying for some blessing he had not got—to be a popular preacher, a great author, a man of wealth and fashion. He envied his rich neighbors every luxury they had, and would have aped their splendor constantly with his own pinchbeck imitations of the same had not his wife withstood him steadily. She tried all possible arguments to make him live simply, modestly; resting upon his sure dignity as a minister of God, who has no need to pay court to any man; whose mere presence is an honor, and who may receive the best society without deviating in the least from his own natural household ways.

For instance, that small snobbishness of a poor man asking rich men to dinner, and giving them dinners like their own, seemed contemptible to the “blue blood” of Josephine Scanlan. When Lady Emma Lascelles came to the Rectory, and walked over, as she always did, to the children's tea at Wren's Nest, Mrs. Scanlan gave her a cordial welcome, the best she had of food and drink, and nothing more. But Mr. Scanlan would have feasted her on silver and gold, and let the family fast for a week to come.

Small differences such as these—springing from the fact that the husband has one standard of right and the wife another, and that they look at things from totally opposite points of view—caused the wheels of life to move not always smoothly in the Scanlan household. How can two walk together unless they be agreed? especially when they have children, and every year the young eyes grow sharper, and the little minds wider and clearer. Alas! often, when the wife's agony has grown dulled by time, the mother's but begins. Many a day, had she been alone, Mrs. Scanlan, in very weariness of warfare, would have laid down her arms, indifferent not merely to prudence and imprudence, but almost to right and wrong. Now she dared not do it, for the sake of her children. To bring them up honestly, simply, in the fear of God and total fearlessness of man, was her one aim and one desire; and to do this she again and again buckled on her armor for this pitiable domestic skirmishing, this guerrilla warfare; having to fight inch by inch of her way, not in an open country, but behind bushes and rocks. For, as I before said, Edward Scanlan was at heart a coward, and his wife was not. In most contests between them he ended by pre-

cipitately quitting the ground; leaving his melancholy mistress to gaze, more humiliated than victorious, round upon her desolate battle-field.

She did this the day after Bridget had given the final *congé* to her lover, and declared her determination not to be "driv out o' the house," but remain a fixture there as long as she lived; which Mrs. Scanlan honestly said she thought was the best thing possible for the family. So Mr. Scanlan had to yield; but the domestic atmosphere was not sunny for a week or more; the mistress had a sad worn face, and the master allowed himself to be irritable over trifles in a way patent even to chance visitors—to the rector, for instance.

"I'll tell you what, Scanlan," said he, one afternoon, when he had spent an hour or two, after his wont, with the family; "you are a good fellow, and a very amusing fellow, but you ought to have been a bachelor."

"I wish I had. It would have saved me a world of trouble," replied the curate, laughing. But he seemed a little vexed for all that. He liked always to appear the amiable paterfamilias. It looked so very much better in a clergyman. And many a time, when visitors were by, he would put his arm round his girls' waists and pat his boys on the shoulder—caresses which these young people received at first with awe and pleasure, then with hesitation, at last with a curious sort of smile. Little folks are so sharp! sharper than big folks have any idea of.

I will not say these children did not love their father, for he was good-natured to them; and they clung to him with the instinct of life-long habit; but they did not respect him, they did not rely upon him. "Oh, papa says so," which meant that secondary evidence was necessary; or, "Papa intends it," which implied that the thing would never be done—grew to be familiar phrases in the household. The mother had simply to shut her ears to them; for to explain them, to argue against them, above all, to reprove them, was impossible.

And thus time went on, and it was years since the day she had heard Mr. Oldham's intentions with regard to her; which at first seemed to make such a momentous difference in her life, but at last sunk into a mere visionary fancy, scarcely believed in at all.

Besides, sad to say, but not wonderful, the secret which she thought would have been a permanent bond of union between herself and her good old friend turned out quite the contrary; rather a bar of separation between them. Her sensitive pride took alarm lest, silent as she was by his command, any filial attentions she might show to him might be misinterpreted; supposed by him to be meant to remind him of his promise. For the same reason all her difficulties and anxieties, yearly accumulating, she hid from him with the utmost care; complainings might have been construed into an entreaty for help, or for some change in the difficult and anomalous position in which he had placed her and allowed her to remain.

It was indeed most difficult; especially with regard to the children, of whom, as he grew feebler, Mr. Oldham's notice gradually lessened. They obviously wearied him, as the young do weary the old. And their mother could not bear to intrude them upon him; would scarcely ever send them to the Rectory, where they used to be such constant guests, lest, as he once said, they might "remind him of his death," and of their own future heirship; also, lest their somewhat provincial manners and shabby dress should be a tacit reproach to him for his half-and-half kindness toward them. For their mother acutely felt that a hundred pounds spent upon them now would be worth more than a thousand ten years hence, if Mr. Oldham lived so long. She would sit calculating how late César might go to college, with any hope of succeeding there; and whether Adrienne and the younger ones could acquire enough accomplishments to make them fit for their probable position. And then she caught herself reckoning—horrible idea!—how long the term of mortal life usually extends, and how long it was likely to extend in Mr. Oldham's case, until she started up, loathing her own imagination, feeling as guilty as if she were compassing the old man's death, and wondering whether the promised fortune was a blessing or an actual curse; for it seemed both alternately.

Sometimes the hope of the future was the only thing that made her present life endurable; again, it haunted her like an evil spirit, until she felt her very nature slowly corrupting under its influence. She was conscious of having at once a bitter scorn for money, and yet an exaggerated appreciation of its value, and an unutterable craving to possess it. Then oftentimes she felt herself such an arrant hypocrite. Luckily, her husband never talked of the future—it was not his way; he took things easily, would have eaten calmly his last loaf, and then been quite surprised that the cupboard was empty. But Bridget often let out her own humble fears about "them poor dear children," and the way they were growing up; and one or two of her neighbors came and advised with her on the subject—wondering what she meant to do with César, and whether, presently, he would not be able to leave the grammar-school and get a small clerkship, or be apprenticed to some respectable—very respectable—trade. To all of which remarks and not unkindly anxieties she had but one answer, given with a desperate bluntness which made people comment rather harshly upon how very peculiar Mrs. Scanlan was growing, that "she did not know."

It was the truth; she really did not know. Mr. Oldham's total silence on the subject often made her fancy she must have mistaken him in some strange way, or that he had changed his mind altogether concerning her. The more so, as there gradually grew up a slight coolness between him and her husband. Whether it was that the rector had offended the huge

self-esteem of his curate—and of all enmity, the bitterest is that of a vain man whose vanity has been wounded; or else the curate had been seen through—clearer than ever—by the astute and acute old rector; but certainly they never got on well when they did meet, and they gradually met as seldom as possible. Mr. Oldham generally called at Wren's Nest when Mr. Scanlan was absent; and Mr. Scanlan always found an excuse ready for sending his wife alone when invitations came from the Rectory.

Yet still he every now and then harped upon his stock grievance—the great injustice with which he was treated in being so underpaid, and compelled, for the sake of wife and family, to hide his light under a bushel at Ditchley, when he might be acquiring fame and fortune in London. And still he at times suggested going there, or threatening to go, that, to detain him, Mr. Oldham might still further increase his salary. To all of which notions and projects his wife opposed a firm, resolute negative—that of silence. She let him talk as much as he liked—and he dearly enjoyed talking—but she herself spoke no more.

At length a thing happened which broke this spell of sullen dumbness—broke it perhaps for her good, for she felt herself slowly freezing up into a hard and bitter woman. Still, the way the blow fell was sharp and unexpected.

Her husband came home one night, irritable exceedingly. Now many a wife knows well enough what that means, and her heart yearns over the much-tried man, who has been knocked about in the world all day and comes to her for rest, and shame if he can not find it! even though he may task her patience and forbearance a little sometimes. But irritability was not Edward's failing; he rather failed in the opposite direction—in that imperturbable indifference to all cares and all troubles which did not personally annoy himself, which often passes muster as “the best temper in the world;” though, undoubtedly, he was by nature of a better temper than his wife, in whom circumstances were gradually increasing certain acerbities, not uncommon in strong and high-spirited women, but yet far from beautiful. And Mr. Scanlan's easy *laissez aller* tried Mrs. Scanlan to the last limit of feminine endurance.

To-day, however, they seemed to have changed characters. She was calm, and he was sorely out of humor. He found fault with Bridget, the children, the house, every thing—nay, even with herself, which he did not often do. And he looked so ill and wretched, lying on the sofa all the evening, and scarcely saying a word to any one, that she grew alarmed.

When the children had gone to bed the secret came out—not naturally, but dragged out of him, like a worm out of its hole, and then pieced together little by little, until, in spite of numerous concealments and contradictions, Mrs. Scanlan arrived at a tolerable idea of what was wrong.

Her husband had gone and done what most men of his temperament and character are very prone to do—it looks so generous to oblige a friend, and flatters one's vanity to be able to do it—he put his name to a bill of accommodation. The “friend” turned out as such persons usually do, a mere scoundrel, and had just vanished, to Greece, or Turkey, or Timbuctoo, little matter where; but he could not be found, and the acceptor of the bill had to pay it all.

“I declare, Josephine, I had no idea of such a thing,” pleaded he, eagerly; “I thought it was a mere form: and after it was done I quite forgot all about it. I did, indeed, my dear wife.”

“I fully believe you,” Josephine said, bitterly. Hitherto she had opposed not a word to his stream of talk, explanations, regrets, apologies. He never looked at her, or he would have seen her slowly whitening face, her rigid mouth, and knotted hands.

“But isn't it unlucky—so very unlucky for me?”

“For us, you mean,” said Mrs. Scanlan, slowly. “But do you think you can tax your memory enough to tell me just two facts? How much have you to pay? and how soon must you pay it?”

Facts were not the prominent peculiarity of Edward Scanlan; but at last she elicited from him that the bill was over-due, and that it amounted to two hundred pounds.

“Two hundred pounds! And when did you sign it?”

“A year ago—six months—I really forgot.” She looked at him with her indignant eyes. “Edward, why did you not tell me at the time?”

“Oh, my dear, you would have made such a fuss about it. And besides it was merely signing my name. I never expected to be called upon to pay a farthing. I never should have been but that my friend—”

“You have never said yet who is your friend.”

“Ah, that was your fault. You always disliked him, so that I could not mention him. Otherwise I should never have thought of not telling you. It was your doing, you see; you were always so unjust to poor Summerhayes.”

“So—it was Mr. Summerhayes for whom you accepted the bill?”

“I could not help it, Josephine, I assure you. He kept writing to me letter after letter.”

“What letters? I never saw them.” Edward Scanlan blushed; yes, he had the grace to blush. “No, they never came here: I knew they would only make you angry, so I had them directed to the post-office. In fact, my darling, I was really afraid of you.”

“Afraid of me!” said Josephine, turning away. And as she did so there crept into her heart a feeling worse than indignation, jealousy, or wounded love—the most fatal feeling any wife can have—not anger, but contempt for her husband.

Edward Scanlan was mistaken; she made “no fuss” about this. Women like her seldom

waste their strength in idle struggles against the inevitable. She bore the disastrous revelation so quietly that he soon began to think it had not affected her at all, and recovered his spirits accordingly. If Josephine did not mind it, of course the thing could be of no consequence: she would find a way out of it; she was so very sensible a woman. For among the pathetic bits of good in him which accounted for his wife's lingering love, was this unfailing belief in her, and unlimited reliance upon her. Surely, with the aid and counsel of his good Josephine he would be able to swim through that unpleasant affair. "Unpleasant" was the only light in which it occurred to him. The actual sin of the thing, and the weakness, almost amounting to wickedness, of a man who, rather than say No to another man, will compromise the interests of his own nearest and dearest, did not strike in any way the curate of Ditchley. He became quite cheerful.

"I am so glad to see how well you take it. Truly, my dear, you are the best wife in England, and I always say so to every body. And since you agree with me that I could not avoid this difficulty, I hope you will help me in trying to get out of it."

"How?"

"By going to Mr. Oldham and asking him to lend us the money. He has lots of capital lying idle—I know that—and two hundred pounds is nothing to him, even if he gave it instead of lending it. But I don't ask him to give it, only to lend it, and on ample security."

"On what security?"

"My own; my I O U—my 'promise to pay,' which perhaps you don't understand; women are so ignorant about business. Personal security is of course all I can offer, unless I had a fortune. Heigh-ho! I wish somebody—some wealthy old spinster, or miserly old bachelor like Oldham—would leave me one!"

Josephine's breath almost failed her. Though her husband had spoken in the most random, careless way, she looked at him in terror, as if he knew the truth. But no; her own timorous conscience had been alone to blame.

"Why, Josephine, how red you have turned! Have I said such a dreadful thing, or are you getting furious, as usual, because I suggest applying to Mr. Oldham for money? Not in the old way, you will observe; this way is quite legal and unobjectionable—a transaction between gentleman and gentleman; and he ought to feel rather flattered that I do apply to him. But you—you seem as frightened of that poor old fellow—who is fast breaking down, I see—as if he were the Great Mogul himself."

Josephine paused a little. In her answer it was necessary to weigh every word.

"Edward," she said at last, "if you do this you must do it yourself. I can not and will not beg from Mr. Oldham in any shape or under any pretext. He pays us sufficiently, and more than sufficiently, and I wish to keep free from all obligations to him."

"You are perfectly silly! Why should we not get as much out of him as we can? He has no children, as we have, and goodness only knows who is his heir, if he has any. He may leave all his money to a college or a foundling hospital. Let him! Who cares?"

"No one ought to care. It is his own, to do what he likes with."

"Bless me! If I thought I had the slightest chance wouldn't I have a try for it! If the rector would only leave his property to his poor curate—not the most unnatural thing either!—why we might almost live upon *post-obits*."

"Will you tell me what is a *post-obit*?"

"You innocent, dear woman! Only a bond given as security for money advanced, to be paid after the death of one's father, or uncle, or any one to whom one is lawful heir. Many a young fellow supports himself for years upon *post-obits*. I only wish I had a chance of trying the system."

"Fortunately you have none," said his wife, in her hard, unwifely tone. And yet, had she been married to a hero, nay, to an ordinarily upright and high-minded man, Josephine Scanlan would any day have died for her husband. Harder still, she would have helped him to die. She was the sort of woman to have gone with him to the very foot of the scaffold, clung around his haltered neck, or laid his disgraced head upon her bosom, heeding nothing for worldly shame, so that she herself could reverence him still. But now? Well, the man was—what he was; and, alas! he was her husband..

She might have been too hard upon him, exacting from him a nobility of thought and action of which few are capable—striving forever to pull out the mote from his eyes, and forgetting the beam in her own. And yet—and yet—

I can not judge—I dare not. When I—Winifred (not Winifred Weston now)—look at the dear face opposite to me, on my own hearth, I know that such a marriage would have maddened me.

Ignorant as she was in many worldly things, Mrs. Scanlan knew enough to see that, though her husband had brought himself into it foolishly rather than guiltily, his position was very critical. Unless he could meet the bill, he would have to give up every thing he had—and that was not worth two hundred pounds. No wonder that, as she drew him back again to the subject in hand, and they began to discuss every possible way in which he could avoid the consequences of his imprudence, Edward Scanlan gradually became so terrified that, even with the demon of contempt lurking at the bottom of her heart, his wife felt almost sorry for him.

"Help me! do help me!" he cried. "I have nobody in the wide world to help me but you."

That was true; truer far than he meant it to be. For the once charming curate had a little worn out the admiration of his flock. He got fewer invitations than he used to have, and those among the new rather than the old in-

habitants of Ditchley. Of these latter, the younger folks began to look upon him as a middle-aged father of a family, and the seniors found, both in his conversation and character, a certain lack of that stability and wisdom which replace so nobly, in many men, the attractiveness of youth. Perhaps, too, others besides Bridget and Mr. Oldham, when thrown in nearer relations with him, had in course of years "seen through" Mr. Scanlan. At any rate, his popularity was a little waning in the neighborhood, and if he did not guess the fact his wife did—pretty plainly.

As to how it affected her—well, a man might not easily understand, but I think most women would. When he said—with what he did not know was truth, only pitiful appeal—"I have nobody to help me but you," and leaned his head on her shoulder, his wife did not thrust him away; she drew him closer, with a sad tenderness.

"Poor Edward!" said she, softly. "Yes; I will help you if I can."

And she sat a long time thinking; while Mr. Scanlan went on talking, arguing with her in every possible form the duty and necessity of her making application to Mr. Oldham. She returned no answer, for another scheme had darted into her mind. Alas! she was growing into a painfully quick-witted woman—as alive to the main chance, she often thought, as any man could be.

Those jewels of hers—long put by and never used—they were worth fully two hundred pounds. She knew that by the brooch she had once sold. She had never tried to sell any more; she thought she would keep them, these relics of her youth and her early married life, until the day when her prosperous condition would make them suitable for her wearing. But now, if she could dispose of them, temporarily, to some friend who would generously allow her to redeem them! And then she thought of Lady Emma Lascelles, between whom and herself had sprung up something as like friendship as could well exist between a curate's wife and an earl's daughter married to a millionaire.

"I will get Lady Emma's address from the Rectory, and write to her." And she explained to Mr. Scanlan the reason why.

He did not object, having fallen into that dejected condition in which he never objected to any thing, but let his wife do just as she liked. Nor did he now take a sentimental view of her parting with her marriage pearls; the practicalities of life had long since knocked all sentiment out of him. He only implored her to conduct the transaction with the utmost care, and let nobody know, especially the rector.

"For I think—indeed, I am sure—that somebody has given him a hint about the matter. He sent me a rather curt note requesting me to come and speak to him at ten o'clock to-morrow morning on my way to the vestry-

meeting. It may be only about vestry business; but I wish I was well out of it, or I wish you could go instead of me, my dearest Josephine."

"I wish I could," she said, with a mixture of pity and bitterness; and then stopped herself from saying any more.

They took the pearls out of her jewel-case, a beautiful set—the bridegroom's present on her wedding-day. But neither referred to that; possibly neither remembered the fact; these memories wear out so strangely fast amidst all the turmoil and confusion of life; and the crisis of the present was too imminent, the suspense too great.

"Lady Emma is at Paris now, I think; but I can easily get her exact address. I will go up to the Rectory for it to-morrow morning; or you could ask yourself, Edward."

"Not I. I will have nothing to do with it. Manage your own affairs."

"My own affairs!" Well, they were her own now—her children's whole future might be at stake on the chance of Lady Emma's acting promptly and kindly. But there was little fear, she had so good a heart. "I feel sure she will buy them," said Mrs. Scanlan, locking up the case again. "And I shall beg her to let me buy them back if ever we are rich enough for me to wear them."

"You never will wear them," said the curate, drearily. "Depend upon it, Josephine, we are slowly sinking—sinking into abject poverty. You would not let me get a chance of rising in the world, and now you must reap the results. Mark my words, your sons will end in being mere tradesmen—wretched, petty tradesmen." For Mr. Scanlan, being only a generation removed from that class, had a great contempt for it, and a great dread of being in any way identified or mixed up with it.

"My sons!" cried the poor mother, suddenly remembering them and what they might come to, if at this crisis things went ill, if no money were attainable to meet the bill, and it were put into a lawyer's hands; when, supposing he were unable to pay it, he would assuredly be sent to prison. After such a dire disgrace it would be all over with him and them all, for Mr. Oldham would never receive him again as curate, and Ditchley, which, with all its narrowness, was quite old-fashioned in its innocent honesty, certainly never would.

"My poor boys!" Mrs. Scanlan repeated, piteously; then started up erect, her black eyes flashing, and her whole figure dilated. "I do not care," she said; "whatever happens, I do not care. Edward, I had rather see my César, my Louis, an honest butcher or baker than a thief of a 'gentleman'—like your friend Mr. Summerhayes."

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER his wife's fierce ebullition about "a thief of a gentleman" Mr. Scanlan did the only wise thing a husband could do under the circumstances—he held his tongue. Next morning, even, he took every opportunity, not of renewing, but of eluding the subject. Fortunately he had to leave early; and after he had started for a long day of what he called "parish duties"—which meant a brief vestry-meeting and a long series of pastoral visits afterward to luncheon, dinner, and so on, at various hospitable houses—Josephine sat down to collect her thoughts before she paid her call to the Rectory.

Though she saw Mr. Oldham less often than of yore, and there had grown up between them a vague reserve, still she knew he liked her still, and she liked him very sincerely. Both the old man and the young woman had instinctively felt from the first that theirs were sympathetic and faithful natures, and no drawbacks of circumstances could alienate the firm friendship between them, though it was one of those dormant friendships which sometimes never thoroughly awaken in this world, and, ceasing out of it, leave us with the feeling less of what they were than what they might have been. Nevertheless, the tie between Mrs. Scanlan and the old rector was strong enough to make it difficult for her to disguise from him her present heavy anxiety, especially if, as her husband suspected, he had some inkling of it already. What if he questioned her why she wanted Lady Emma's address? Some simple feminine reason might easily be assigned; but that Josephine scorned. No small womanish arts were at all in her line; she must always go straight to her point. If Mr. Oldham asked her, she must, of course, tell him the exact state of the case; but, for her husband's sake, she determined to keep it back as long as possible.

These anxious thoughts showed so plainly in her face that Bridget, coming into the parlor to find out the cause of her mistress's unusual state of quiescence, read them at once.

"You've got another botheration, ma'am, I see. Tell it me, do. The children are safe out of doors; look at 'em all playing in the garden, so full of fun! It'll do your heart good, ma'am dear."

Poor Bridget had touched the right chord; the hard, stony look passed from Mrs. Scanlan's face; she began to weep, and once beginning she could not stop. By degrees her faithful servant had coaxed her out of half her trouble, and guessed the rest.

Bridget drew a long breath, and, being behind her mistress's back, clenched her sturdy fist and pulled her good, ugly face into a succession of villainous frowns, which might be meant for any body or nobody—but she said nothing. And there, I think, the poor servant deserves some credit, and some pity too. Her life was

a long series of self-suppression. What she felt toward her mistress and the children was patent enough; her feelings toward her master nobody knew. It is hard to disguise love; but it is still harder to hide its opposite; and, perhaps, the hardest thing of all is to see the object of one's love a willing, deluded victim to the object of one's—not hatred, perhaps—but intense aversion and contempt. Bridget despised her master; there was no doubt about that; yet I feel sure that throughout her life she never let her mistress know it. Which fact, I think, may fairly place the poor, unlettered Irishwoman in the rank of heroines.

Bridget had no question that Lady Emma would buy the jewels, and hold her tongue on the matter too. "She was a rale lady, and could keep a secret." Logic at which Mrs. Scanlan smiled faintly. But still in many ways the devotedness of the woman comforted her heart—not for the first time.

It may seem strange, and some people may be much scandalized at it, that this poor lady should be so confidential with her servant; more so than with her husband. But it must be remembered that in both Irish and French households the relation between superiors and inferiors is both freer and closer than it is in England generally; and, besides, she could trust Bridget. No shams with her! no mean, double-minded, worldly ways; no half-truths, or prevarications arranged so cleverly as, without telling an actual lie, to give the appearance of one. Irish though she was—(I confess with sorrow an all but universal Celtic fault!)—Bridget had learned, difficultly and painfully, to "tell truth and shame the devil," and her mistress loved her accordingly.

"Wish me good-speed," said she, as the loving servant threw something after her from the door "for luck." "I trust I may come back with a lighter heart than I go."

And slipping away out of sight of her little folks, who would have overwhelmed her with questions about her unusual errand to Ditchley alone, Mrs. Scanlan walked quickly across the common, even as she had done the day she had first heard Mr. Oldham's secret, years ago.

How many they seemed! And how many more appeared to have slipped by since she was married! Married—on just such a morning as this, a soft February morning, with the sap just stirring in the leafless trees, the buds forming on the bare hedges, the sky growing blue, and the sunshine warm, and the thrushes beginning to sing. All the world full of youth and hope, and half-awakened spring, as her life was then. For she had loved him; with a foolish, girlish, half-fledged love; still, undoubtedly, she had loved him, this Edward Scanlan, whom now she could hardly believe sometimes was the Edward she had married.

A frantic vision crossed her of what she had thought then their married life would be; what it might have been—ay, and what even after they had settled at Ditchley she had tried hard

to make it. For how little their loss of fortune would have harmed them had Mr. Scanlan only been content with such things as he had—had they rejoiced over their daily blessings, and been patient with their inevitable cares! How much wiser if, instead of pestering Providence like angry creditors for what they fancied their due, they had accepted His gifts like dear children, believing in the father who loved even while He denied!

This faith, which I conclude Mr. Scanlan taught, like most clergymen, in the letter of his sermons, was now the only rag of religion left in Josephine. Doctrines which her husband with his other Evangelical brethren was very strong in she did not believe in one whit; or rather she never considered whether they were true or false. They had been dinned into her with such weary iteration, preached at her on all occasions—only preached, not practiced—that now she let them alone; they went in at one ear and out at the other. She did not actually loathe them; mercifully, Christianity is so divine that all pure souls instinctively accept it and cling to it, in spite of the corruptions of its followers; but she ignored them as much as she could, and taught as little as possible of them to her children. But at every step she was stopped; even at the Lord's Prayer, when her youngest child, to whom she tried to explain why he was to call God "Our Father," and what a father was, horrified her by the simple question, "Is God any thing like papa?"

Poor mother! Poor children! And they had all "souls to be saved," as Mr. Scanlan would have put it. But happily he did not perplex himself much about the souls of his own family; he took it for granted that, being his family, they were all right, when in truth they were in a spirit of skeptical contempt worse than the blackest heathenism. It required many years and many sorrows to bring Josephine Scanlan to the light; and her children, save perhaps Adrienne, died without seeing it, or recognizing in "the Gospel" any thing beyond a cant phrase, which meant nothing, or worse than nothing. "No wonder!" said Bridget one day to me, unconscious of the bitter satire of her words. "You see, Miss, their papa was a clergyman."

Fiercely and fast, thinking as little as possible of how she should word her errand, and nerving herself for disappointment, as if it were her usual lot, Mrs. Scanlan walked through the Rectory garden to the front-door. It stood wide open, though the day was cold, and up and down the usually silent house were sounds of many feet. Nevertheless, she rang several times before the bell was answered. Then appeared some under-servant with a frightened face, by which Josephine perceived that something was terribly wrong.

"What has happened—your master?" and a sudden constriction of the heart made her stop. She felt almost as if her thoughts had murdered him.

No, Mr. Oldham was not dead. Worse than dead, almost, for his own sake and others. He had gone to his study, desiring he might not be disturbed till lunch-time, as he had "business." At one o'clock the butler went in and found him lying on the floor, alive and sensible, but speechless and motionless. How long he had lain there, or what had brought on the fit, no one knew, or was ever likely to know. For Dr. Waters, who had been fetched at once, said it was very unlikely he would ever speak again. The paralysis which had struck him was of that saddest kind which affects the body, not the mind; at least not at first. Poor Mr. Oldham would be, for the rest of his days, whether few or many, little better than a living corpse, retaining still the imprisoned but conscious soul.

"Oh, doctor, this is terrible! Is there no hope?"

Dr. Waters, coming down the staircase, wrung Mrs. Scanlan's hands, but replied nothing. He was much affected himself, and so was Mr. Langhorne, the rector's man of business, who followed him. The two old gentlemen—old, though still much younger than Mr. Oldham—were noted as very great "chums," and the two honestest and best men in all Ditchley, even though, as satirical people sometimes said, one was a doctor and the other a lawyer. They stood talking together mournfully, evidently consulting over this sad conjuncture of affairs.

"Yes, I have been putting seals upon all his papers," said Mr. Langhorne. "It is the only thing to be done until—until further change. There is nobody to take any authority here: he has no relations."

"Except Lady Emma, and she is abroad; I do not know where. Perhaps Mrs. Scanlan does."

Dr. Waters turned to her, as she stood aloof, feeling herself one too many in this house of grief, and as if she had no right there. And yet she felt the grief as deeply as any one; more so, perhaps, because it was not unmixed with remorse. Kind, good Mr. Oldham!—why had she neglected him of late—why suffered her foolish pride, her ridiculous sensitiveness, to come between her and him? How she wished she had put both aside, and shown fearlessly to the lonely old man what a tender and truly filial heart she bore toward him!

"I know nothing about Lady Emma," said she, forgetting how she had come to ask that very question, and how serious it was for herself that it could not be answered. Her own affairs had drifted away from her mind. "Only tell me, will he ever recover, ever speak again?"

"I fear not; though he may lie in his present state for months, and even years; I have known such cases. Why do you ask? Did you come to speak to him about business? I hope all is right between your husband and him?"

Mrs. Scanlan bent her head assentingly.

"That is well. I was half afraid they had



"IS THERE NO HOPE?"

had some little difficulties of late. And now Mr. Scanlan will have the whole duty on his hands, and Langhorne and I, as church-wardens, ought to make our arrangements accordingly."

So they both fell into business talk, as men do fall, even after such a catastrophe as this, though it seemed shocking enough to the woman who, with her woman's heart full, stood and listened. No one interfered with her. As the curate's wife she had a certain right to be in the house. No other right did she for a moment venture to urge. She only sat and listened.

Shortly she caught a sentence which startled her.

"He will never be capable of business again, that is quite certain," said the doctor. "I do hope he has made his will."

"Hem—I believe—I have some reason to suppose he has," replied the cautious lawyer. "But these things are of course strictly private."

"Certainly, certainly; I only asked because he once said he intended to make me his executor. But he might do that without telling

me; and I shall find it out soon enough when all is over."

"All over," that strange periphrasis out of the many by which people like to escape the blank plain word—death! Mrs. Scanlan listened—she could not keep herself from listening—with an eagerness that, when she caught the eyes of the two old men, made her blush crimson, like a guilty person.

But the doctor's mind was preoccupied, and the lawyer apparently either knew nothing, or else—and this thought smote Josephine with a cold fear—there was nothing to be known. Mr. Oldham might long ago have burned his will, and made another. Her future and that of her children hung on a mere thread.

The suspense was so dreadful, the conflict in her conscience so severe, that she could not stand it.

"I think," she said, "since I can do no good here, I had better go home. Shall I write to Lady Emma? But in any case I want her address for myself; will Mr. Langhorne look in Mr. Oldham's address-book for it?"

This was easily done, the old rector being

so accurate and methodical in all his habits. But the result of the search stopped any hope of applying to Lady Emma, even if, under the circumstances, Mrs. Scanlan could have made up her mind to apply. The address was, "Poste Restante, Vienna."

But Josephine scarcely felt that last shock. All she said was, "Very well; she is too far off for me to write to her. I will go home."

But she had hardly got through the Rectory garden when Mr. Langhorne overtook her.

The good lawyer was a very shy man. He had raised himself from the ranks, and still found his humble origin, his *gauche* manners, and a most painful stammer he had, stood a good deal in his way. But he was a very honest and upright fellow; and though she had seldom met him in society, Mrs. Scanlan was well aware how highly Mr. Oldham and all his other neighbors respected him, and how in that cobwebby little office of his lay hidden half the secrets of half the families within ten miles round Ditchley.

He came up to her hesitatingly. "Excuse me, ma'am; taking great liberty, I know; but if you had any affairs to transact with poor Mr. Oldham, and I as his man of business could ass-ass-assist you—"

Here he became so nervous, and began stammering so frightfully, that Mrs. Scanlan had time to recover from her surprise and collect her thoughts together. Her need was imminent. She must immediately consult somebody—and do it herself, for her husband was sure to escape the painful thing if possible. Why should she not consult this man, who was a clever man, a good man, and a lawyer besides? And, after all, Mr. Scanlan's misfortune was only a misfortune, no disgrace. He had done a very foolish thing, but nothing really wrong.

So she took courage and accepted Mr. Langhorne's civility so far as to communicate to him her present strait; why she'd wished to write to Lady Emma; and why, even if there were no other reason, the uncertainty of the lady's movements made it impracticable. Yet she could see no other way out of this crisis, and her need was imperative.

"Otherwise," she said, with a sort of bitter pride, "believe me, I never should have communicated my husband's private affairs in this way."

"They would not have been private much longer, Madam," said the lawyer, seeming to take in the case at a glance, and to treat it as a mere matter of business, happening every day. "You have no time to lose; Mr. Scanlan must at once pay the money, or the law will take its course. Shall I advance him the sum? Has he any security to give me?"

He had none; except his personal promise to pay, which his wife well knew was not worth a straw. But she could not say so.

"I had rather," she replied, "be quit of debt entirely, in the way I planned. Will you buy my jewels instead of Lady Emma? They are

worth more than two hundred pounds. You could easily sell them, or if you would keep them for me I might be able to repurchase them."

Poor soul! she was growing cunning. As she spoke she keenly investigated the lawyer's face, to find out whether he thought—had any cause to think—she should ever be rich enough to repurchase them. But Mr. Langhorne's visage was impenetrable.

"As you will," he said; "it makes no difference to me; I only wished to oblige a neighbor and a friend of Mr. Oldham's. Will your husband come to me to-morrow? Or you yourself? Perhaps you had better come yourself."

"Yes, if you desire it, as my husband will be much engaged."

"And take my advice, Mrs. Scanlan—say nothing in Ditchley about this matter of the bill. As we lawyers know, such things are best kept as quiet as possible. Good-afternoon."

Kind as he was, the old man's manner was a little patronizing, a little dictatorial; but Josephine did not care for that. Her distress was removed, for she had no doubt of getting her husband to agree to this arrangement; so as he had the money, it mattered little to him how it was obtained. She hastened home, and met Mr. Scanlan at the gate. He was coming from an opposite quarter, and evidently quite ignorant of all that had happened at the Rectory.

"Well!" he said, eagerly, "have you got me the money?" having apparently quite forgotten how she had meant to get it. "Are things all right?"

"Yes, I have arranged it. But—" And then she told him the terrible blow which had fallen upon poor Mr. Oldham.

"Good Heavens! what a dreadful thing to happen! If I had thought it would have happened— But I had no idea he was ill, I assure you I had not."

"Did you see him, then, this morning?"

The news affected Mr. Scanlan more than his wife had expected, seeing he always took other people's misfortunes and griefs so lightly. He staggered, and turned very pale.

Nobody seeming to know of her husband's having been at the Rectory, she concluded he had not gone there; it was no new thing for Edward Scanlan to fail in an appointment, particularly one that he suspected might not be altogether pleasant.

"Yes, I saw him; he let me into the house himself. He had been on the look-out for me to give me a lecture; which he did, for one whole hour, and very much he irritated me. Indeed, we both of us lost our tempers, I fear."

"Edward! The doctor said some agitation must have caused this; surely, surely—"

"It is no use worrying me, Josephine; what is done is done, and can't be avoided. I don't deny we had some hot words, which I am very

sorry for now; but how on earth was I to know he was ill? You can't blame me!"

Yet he seemed conscious of being to blame, for he excused himself with nervous eagerness.

"I do assure you, my dear, I was patient with him as long as ever I could, and it was difficult; for somehow he had found out about the bill, and he was very furious. He said my conduct was 'unworthy a gentleman and a clergyman,' that I should ruin you and the children, and similar nonsense; declaring that if such a thing ever happened again he would do—something or other, I can't tell what, for he began to mumble in his speech, and then—"

"And then? Oh, husband! for once in your life tell me exactly the truth, and the whole truth."

"I will—only you need not imply that I am a story-teller. Don't lose your temper, Josephine; you sometimes do. Well, Mr. Oldham lost his; he grew red and furious, and then his words got confused. I thought he was only in a passion, and that I had better leave him to himself; so I went away quietly—I declare quite quietly—slipped out of the room, in short—for somebody might hear us, and that would have been so awkward."

"And you noticed nothing more?"

"Well, yes; I think—I am not sure—but I think, as I shut the study door, there was a noise—some sort of a fall; but I could not go back; you know, and I did not like to call the servants; they might have found out we had been quarreling."

"They might have found out you had been quarreling," repeated Josephine, slowly, with a strange contempt in her tone. "And this was, when?"

"About eleven, I fancy."

"And he lay on the floor till one—lay helpless and speechless, not a creature coming near him! Poor old man! And you let him lie. It was your doing. You—"

"Coward" was the word upon her lips; but happily she had enough sense of duty left not to utter it. She left him to hear it from the voice of his own conscience. And he did hear it; for he had a conscience, poor weak soul that he was. He could not keep from sinning; yet when he had sinned he always knew it. This was what made dealing with him so very difficult. His pitiful contrition almost disarmed reproach.

"Josephine, if you look at me like that I shall almost feel as if I had killed him. Poor Mr. Oldham! who would have thought it? And I know you think it is all my fault. You are cruel to me, very cruel. You that are so tender to the children—to every body—are as hard as a stone to your own husband."

Was that true? Her conscience in turn half accused her of it. She tried to put on an encouraging smile, entreating him not to get such fancies into his head, but to make the best of things. In vain! He threw himself on the

sofa in such a paroxysm of distress and self-reproach that it took all his wife's efforts to quiet him and prevent him from betraying himself to the household. And she felt as much as he that nothing must be betrayed. No one must know the part which he had had in causing this attack of Mr. Oldham's. That he had caused it was clear enough; one of those unfortunate fatalities which sometimes occur, making one dread inexpressibly ever to do an unkind thing or delay doing a kind one, since, in common phraseology, "one never knows what may happen."

In this case what had happened was irretrievable. To publish it abroad would be worse than useless, and might seriously injure Mr. Scanlan; just now especially, when so much additional responsibility would fall upon him. Far better that this fact—which nobody at Ditchley knew—of his interview with the rector should be kept among those sad secrets of which every life is more or less full.

So Josephine reasoned with her husband, and soothed him as she best could. Only soothed him; for it was hopeless to attempt more. To rouse him into courage—to stimulate him into active goodness, for the pure love of goodness, had long since become to her a vain hope. Powerless to spur him on to right, all she could do was to keep him from wrong—to save him from harming himself or others.

"Edward," she said, taking his hand, and regarding him with a mournful pity, "I can not let you talk any more in this strain; it does no good, and only agitates and wears you out. What has happened we can not alter; we must only do our best for the future. Remember to-morrow was his Sunday for preaching—ah, poor Mr. Oldham!—and you have no sermon prepared; you must begin it at once."

This changed the current of the curate's thoughts, always easily enough diverted. He caught at the idea at once, and saw, too, what an admirable opportunity this was for one of his displays of oratory in the pathetic line. He brightened up immediately.

"To be sure, I must prepare my sermon; and it ought to be a specially good one. For after what has occurred half the neighborhood will come to Ditchley church on Sunday, and, of course, they will expect me to refer to the melancholy event."

Josephine turned away, sick at heart. "Oh, Edward, do not mention it; or, if you must, say as little about it as possible."

But she knew her words were idle, her husband being one of those clever men who always make capital out of their calamities. So, after sitting up half the night to compose his discourse—indeed, he partly wrote it, for there had crept into the parish of late a slightly High-Church element which objected to extempore sermons; which element, while abusing it roundly, the curate nevertheless a little succumbed to—he woke his wife about two in the morning to read her the principal passages in the ser-

mon, which he delivered afterward with great success, and much to the admiration of his congregation. His text was, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow," and his pictures of all kinds of terrible accidents and unforeseen misfortunes were most edifying, thrilling all Ditchley with horror, or moving it with pathos. He ended by reverting to their beloved rector and his sudden and sad illness; which he did in a manner so tender, so affecting, that there was scarcely a dry eye in the church. Except one; and that, I am much afraid, was Mrs. Scanlan's.

CHAPTER X.

THERE is a proverb which sometimes seems amazingly true, that "Heaven takes care of fools and drunkards." Can it be for their own sake, or is it out of pity for those belonging to them, to whom they serve as a sort of permanent discipline—the horse-hair shirt and nightly scourge which are supposed to contribute to the manufacture of saints? And it is one of the most mysterious lessons of life that such often is the case; that out of the wickedness of one half of the world is evolved the noble self-devotion of the other half. Why this should be we know not, and sometimes in our ignorance it makes us very angry; but so it is, and we can not help seeing it.

Of a truth, whether he himself thought so or not, Providence had all his life taken pretty good care of Edward Scanlan. His "good luck" followed him still. When, on Mr. Oldham's private affairs being laid open to his lawyer and doctor—who were also, fortunately, the two church-wardens of the parish—it was discovered that the rector had been paying his curate for salary the whole amount of the small living of Ditchley; still no objections were made. His was considered so very peculiar a case that the laborer was found worthy of his hire, and it was cheerfully continued to him. Arrangements were made whereby the curate should take the entire duty of the parish, until, at Mr. Oldham's death, the living should fall in; when—as the patronage of it happened by a curious chance to belong to Lady Emma's husband, Mr. Lascelles—there was exceeding probability of its being bestowed upon Mr. Scanlan. At least, so said Dr. Waters confidentially to Mrs. Scanlan, and she listened silently, with that nervous, pained expression which always came upon her anxious face when people talked to her about her future or her children's.

But for the present things went smoothly enough both with her and them; more so than for a long time. Impelled by his wife's influence, grateful for the ease with which she had got him out of his money difficulty and never reproached him with it, or else touched by some conscience-stings of his own concerning Mr. Oldham, at the time of the rector's illness Mr. Scanlan behaved so well, was so active, so sympathetic, so kind, that the whole parish was

loud in his praise. His sinking popularity rose to its pristine level. All the world was amiably disposed toward him, and toward his hard-worked, uncomplaining wife. In the general opening-up of things people found out Mrs. Scanlan's private relations with Priscilla Nunn. The ladies of her acquaintance, who had worn her mended lace and bought her beautiful muslin embroidery, so far from looking down upon her, rather honored her for it; and, with the warm, good heart of country gentlewomen, patronized Priscilla's shop till Mrs. Scanlan had more work than she could do.

Also, when another secret mysteriously came to light, probably through the curate's own garrulosity, and it was whispered abroad that Mr. Scanlan had greatly hampered himself by going surely for a friend—a most talented, amiable, but temporarily unfortunate friend (which was the poetical version that reached Wren's Nest)—the sympathy of these dear innocent country people rose to such a height that when somebody proposed subscribing a purse as a delicate testimony of their respect for their curate, it was soon filled to the amount of sixty pounds. Thereto was added a gown and cassock, a Bible and Prayer-book—all of which were presented to Mr. Scanlan with great éclat. And he acknowledged the gift in an address so long and effective that, yielding to general entreaty, he had it printed—at his own expense of course—and distributed gratis throughout the county.

Meanwhile Mrs. Scanlan sat at home at Wren's Nest, sewing at her lace and embroidery more diligently than ever, for it was not unnecessary. All these glories without doors did not provide any additional comforts within—at least none that were perceptible—so great was the increase of expenses. Dazzled by the excitement of his new position, his vanity tickled, his sense of importance increased by being now "monarch of all he surveyed" in the large and increasing parish of Ditchley, Mr. Scanlan launched out more and more every day, and was every day less amenable to his wife's gentle reasonings. Not that he openly contradicted her: indeed, when differences occurred, he continually allowed that her way was the right way; but he never followed it, and never lacked excuses for not following it—the good of the parish, the good of the family, his position as a clergyman, and so on. He was not honest enough to say he did a thing because he *liked* to do it, but always found some roundabout reason why it was advisable to do it; at which, finally, Josephine only came to smile without replying one single word. Women learn in time, out of sheer hopelessness, these melancholy hypocrisies.

Meanwhile the curate's money "burned a hole in his pocket," as Bridget expressed it—a bigger hole every day; and had it not been for his wife's earnings, the family must often have run very short—the family, which, besides the younger four, comprised now a great

tall youth, almost a young man, and a girl, small and pale, plain and uninteresting—but yet a growing-up maiden, on the verge of womanhood—more of a woman, in precocity of heart and feeling, than many of the young ladies of Ditchley now “come out,” and even engaged to be married. But there was no coming out and no sweet love episode for poor little Adrienne. Her mother, looking at her, felt sure she would be an old maid, and was glad she saw no one she was likely to care for, so as to wound her tender heart with any unfortunate attachment; for the child was of an imaginative nature, just one of those girls who are apt to fall in love—innocently as hopelessly; and never get over it as long as they live. So, if she ever thought of the matter at all, Josephine was thankful that her girl, shut up in her quiet obscurity, was safe so far.

César was different. About him she had no end of anxieties. He was a manly, precocious boy; full of fun, keen in his enjoyment of life; rough a little, though his innate gentlemanhood kept him from ever being coarse. Still, in spite of her care, his frank, free, boyish nature inclined him to be social, and he caught the tone of his associates. He was growing up to manhood with a strong provincial accent, and a *gauche* provincial manner, much more like the shop-boys, bankers’ clerks, and lawyers’ apprentices of Ditchley, than the last descendant of the long race of De Bougainville.

It might have been a weakness, but she clung to it still—this poor woman, to whom the glories of her ancestry were now a mere dream—her love of the noble line which had upheld for centuries that purest creed of aristocracy—that “all the sons were brave, and all the daughters virtuous.” Now, indeed, it was little more than a fairy tale, which she told to her own sons and daughters in the vague hope of keeping alive in them the true spirit of nobility which had so shone out in their forefathers. Nevertheless, she felt bitterly how circumstances were dead against her poor children, and how it would be almost a miracle if she could keep their heads above water, and bring them up to be any thing like gentlemen and gentlemen.

Her husband seemed very indifferent to the matter. Indeed, after listening for some time, very impatiently, to her arguments that they should make some sacrifice in order to send César to college, he negatived the whole question. It did not affect him personally, and therefore assumed but small dimensions in his mind. He seldom saw César except on Sundays, when it rather annoyed him to have such a big fellow, taller than himself, calling him father. As he said one day to Josephine, “it made one look so old.”

And all this while the poor old rector lay in his shut-up room, or was dragged slowly up and down the paths of his pretty garden, a melancholy spectacle, which gradually the people about him and his sympathizing parision-

ers grew so accustomed to that it ceased to affect them. Satisfied that he had every alleviation of his condition that wealth could supply, they left him to be taken care of by his faithful old servants until should come the happy release; at first looked forward to continually, but gradually becoming less imminent. Even Lady Emma—his most affectionate and nearest friend, though only a third or fourth cousin—after coming from Vienna to Ditchley, and staying a few days, returned, scarcely expecting to see him alive again. Yet he lingered—one year—a year and a half, in much the same state; partially conscious, it was supposed, but able neither to speak nor to move. He ate, drank, and slept, however—passively, but peacefully as a child; his eyes were often as sharp and as bright as ever, and the workings of his countenance showed considerable intelligence, but otherwise his life was a total blank. Death itself seemed to have forgotten him.

Mrs. Scanlan went to see him every Sunday—her leisure day, and her husband’s busiest one, which fact made less apparent the inevitable necessity which she soon discovered, that she must pay her visits alone. From the first appearance of his curate at the rector’s bedside, Mr. Oldham had testified so strong a repugnance to his company that it was necessary to invent all sorts of excuses—thankfully enough received by Mr. Scanlan—to keep him away. And so the formal condolatory visits, and sick-room prayers—spiritual attentions which Mr. Scanlan paid, because he thought people would expect him to pay, to his rector—were tacitly set aside, or took place only at the longest intervals that were consistent with appearances.

However, in all societies he testified the utmost feeling, assured the parishioners that his “dear and excellent friend” was quite “prepared.” Once, when this question was put to Mrs. Scanlan, she was heard to answer “that if not prepared already, she thought it was rather late to begin preparations for death now; and that for her part she considered living was quite as important, and as difficult, as dying.” Which remark was set down as one of the “extraordinary” things Mrs. Scanlan sometimes said—confirming the doubt whether she was quite the pleasant person that she used to be.

Her pleasantness—such as it was—she kept for Mr. Oldham’s sick-chamber; where the old man lay in his sad life-in-death all day long. He was very patient, ordinarily; suffered no pain; and perhaps his long, lonely life made him more submissive to that perpetual solitude, which for him had begun even before the imprisonment of the grave. He seemed always glad to see Mrs. Scanlan. She talked to him, though not much—it was such a mournful monologue to carry on—still he would look interested, and nod his head, and try to mumble out his uncertain words in reply. She read to him, which he always enjoyed immensely. She too; since it was the first time for many years



JOSEPHINE AND THE RECTOR.

that she had had leisure for reading, or considered it right to make for herself that leisure. But now she did it not for herself; and it was astonishing how many books she got through, and what a keen enjoyment she had of them. And sometimes she would simply bring her work and sit beside him, telling him any thing which came into her head—the news of the parish, her children's doings and sayings; to which latter he always listened with pleasure; and she had now no hesitation in talking about them. Whatever the future might be, it was settled by this time. Pride and delicacy were alike needless: the poor helpless old man could alter nothing now. So she lay passive on her oars and tided down with the stream. After Mr. Oldham's illness there came a season of unwonted peace for poor Mrs. Scanlan.

But it was a false peace—impossible to last very long.

There is another proverb—I fear I am fond of proverbs—"Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil." Now, without likening Mr. Scanlan to a beggar, or accusing him of that dangerous equestrian exercise, there is no doubt he was one of the many men who are much safer walking on foot. That is, too great liberty was not good for him. He did better as the poor curate—limited by his prescribed line of duties, and steadied by the balance-weight of his sagacious old rector—than when he was left to himself, responsible to nobody, and with the whole parish on his hands. He was not a good man of business, being neither

accurate nor methodical. Clever he might be; but a clever man is not necessarily a wise man. Ere long he began doing a good many foolish things.

Especially with reference to one favorite *bête noire* he had—Puseyism, as it began to be called. A clergyman with these proclivities had settled in the next parish, and attempted various innovations—choir-singing, altar-decorating, daily services—which had greatly attracted the youth of Ditchley. They ran after the High-Church vicar, just as once their predecessors had run after the young Evangelical curate, which the old Evangelical curate did not like at all.

Mr. Scanlan's congregation fell from him, which irritated his small vanity to the last degree. He tried various expedients to lure them back—a new organ, a Dorcas Society, a fancy bazar—all those religious dissipations which often succeed so well in a country community which happens to have plenty of money and nothing to do—but the errant sheep would not be recalled. At length, maddened by his rival's successes, and by the beautiful new church that was being built for him, a brilliant thought struck Mr. Scanlan that he would try building too. The old school-house, coeval with the parish church of Ditchley, wanted repairs sadly. He proposed to pull it down and erect a new one, of commodious size and Gothic design, a great deal finer and more expensive than the obnoxious church.

This idea restored all his old animation and

sanguine energy. He brought down an architect from London, and went round the parish with him, plan in hand, collecting subscriptions. And Ditchley still keeping up its old spirit of generosity, these came in so fast that a goodly sum was soon laid up in the Ditchley bank, in the combined names of the architect and the treasurer, who was, of course, the Reverend Edward Scanlan. A very simple transaction, which, of course, nobody inquired into; and even Mrs. Scanlan was scarcely cognizant of the fact. Indeed, her husband had rather kept her in the dark as to the whole matter; it pleased him to do it all himself, and to say with a superior air that "women knew nothing of business."

But presently, top-heavy with his success, he became a little difficult to deal with at home, and prone to get into petty squabbles abroad—womanish squabbles, if I may malign my sex by using the adjective. But I have seen as much spite, as much smallness, among men as among any women, only they were men who had lost all true manliness by becoming conceited egotists, wrapped up in self, and blind to any merit save their own. When these happen to be fathers of families, how the domestic bark is ever guided with such a steersman at the helm, God knows! Nothing saves it from utter shipwreck, unless another hand quietly takes the rudder, and, strong in woman's invisible strength, though with streaming eyes and bleeding heart, steers the vessel on.

So had done, or had tried to do, against many cross currents and dangerous shoals, poor Josephine Scanlan. But now her difficulties increased so much that sometimes her numbed hand almost failed in its task; the very stars grew dim above her; every thing seemed wrapped in a dim fog, and she herself as far from land as ever.

Hitherto, though, as before hinted, Mr. Scanlan had hung up his fiddle at his own door, he had always played satisfactorily at his neighbors'. But now he did not get on quite so well with them as formerly. There broke out in him a certain quarrelsomeness, supposed by Saxons to be a peculiarly Hibernian quality, and perhaps it is, with the lowest type of Irish character. He was always getting into hot water, and apparently enjoying the bath, as if it washed away a dormant irritability, which his wife had never noticed in him before. Now she did, and wondered at it a little, till she grew accustomed to it, as to many other faults in him, which, like notches in the bark of a tree, grew larger and uglier year by year.

So large that the children themselves noticed them. It was useless to keep up the high ideal of paternal perfection, which is the salvation of a family; the blessed doctrine that the father can do no wrong; that he must be obeyed, because he would never exact any obedience that was not for the child's good; must be loved, because he loves so dearly every member

of his household. Indeed, these young people sharply criticised, secretly or openly, their father's motives and actions, and continually made out of them excuses for their own shortcomings. "Oh, papa says so-and-so, and nobody blames him;" "Papa told me to do such and such things, so of course I must do them;" until Mrs. Scanlan was almost driven wild by the divided duty of wife and mother—a position so maddening that I should think a woman could hardly keep her senses in it, save by steadily fixing her eyes upward, on a higher duty than either, that which she owes to her God. But, for many a year, He who reveals Himself by the title of "the Father," and the promise, "I will be an husband unto you," had veiled Himself from her in the clouds and darkness generated by her mortal lot, which was such a daily mockery of both these names.

She herself was cruelly conscious how much she was changed, and how rapidly changing; growing callous to pain, indifferent to pleasure, even that of her children; neglectful of her appearance and theirs; allowing her household to sink into those untidy ways, so abhorrent to inbred refinement, which mark the last dependency of poverty. The bright energy with which she used to preach to Bridget and the children on the subject of clean faces and clean clothes, order, neatness, and prettiness—since no narrowness of means warranted a family in living in a daily muddle, like pigs in a sty—all this was quite gone. She rarely complained and never scolded. Toward her husband, above all, she was falling into that passive state of indifference, sadder than either grief or anger. She took little interest in his affairs, and seldom asked him any questions about them. Where was the use of it, when she could place no reliance on his answers?

Oftentimes, with a bitter joy, she thought how much wiser Mr. Oldham had been than she in pledging to keep the secret; and how well it was that she still retained it; if, indeed, there were any secret to retain. That, until the rector's death, she could not possibly discover. He must have made his will, but in whose possession it was, or whether any body was aware of its contents, she knew no more than that often appealed to personage, the man in the moon, who seemed to have as much influence over her destiny as any thing else, or any body either, in heaven or earth. She felt herself drifting along in blind chance, not knowing from day to day what would happen, or what she ought to do.

Often, when returning home from her evening visits to Mr. Oldham, she wished she had never heard from him one word about his money or its destination—that she had struggled on patiently, as a poor curate's wife, and made her boys little butchers or bakers, and her girls milliners or school-teachers, to earn an honest livelihood by the sweat of their brow. Then again, in her passionate ambition for them, she felt that to realize this fortune, to give them all

they wanted and make them all she desired them to be, she would have "sold her soul to the devil," had that personage appeared to her, as he did to Doctor Faustus and other tempted souls. She could understand thoroughly the old wives' tales about persons bewitched or possessed; sometimes she felt Satan almost as near to her as if he had started out of a bush on the twilight common, and confronted her in the visible likeness of the Prince of the power of the air—hoofs, horns, tail, and all.

Thus time went on, and it was already two years since Mr. Oldham's attack; yet still no kind angel of death had appeared to break with merciful touch his fetters of flesh, and lift him, a happy new-born soul, out of this dreary world into the world everlasting. And still to the much-tried mother remained unsolved the mystery of life, more difficult, as she had once truly said, than dying; and she knew not from week to week either what she ought to do, or how she should do it—above all, with regard to her children.

They were growing up fast; César being now a tall youth of sixteen; very handsome, with the high aquiline features and large-limbed frame of his Norman ancestors; not clever exactly—Louis was the clever one among the boys—but sensible, clear-headed, warm-hearted; with a keen sense of right and wrong, which he acted upon in a somewhat hard and fierce fashion, not uncommon in youth. But in this his mother rather encouraged than condemned him. Any harshness of principle was better to her than that fatal laxity which had been, and continued to be, the bane of her domestic life.

César and his father were cast in such a totally opposite mould, that, as years advanced, they naturally divided further and further. Both were very much out of the house, and, when they met within it, they kept a polite neutrality. Still sometimes domestic jars occurred; and one great source of irritation was the father's extreme anxiety that his son's school-days should end, and he should begin to earn his own living. Of course, as he reasoned, a poor curate's sons could not expect their father to do more than give them a respectable education. The rest they must do for themselves.

"Yes," their mother would say, when the question was argued, and say no more—how could she? Only she contrived to stave off the evil day as long as possible; and keep César steadily at his studies in the grammar-school, which was a very good school in its way, till something turned up.

At last, unfortunately, something did turn up. Mr. Scanlan came home one night in high satisfaction; the manager of Ditchley bank having offered to take César as junior clerk with a salary of a few shillings a week.

Josephine stood aghast. Not that she objected to her boy's earning his living, but she wished him first to get an education that would fit him for doing it thoroughly and well, and

make him equal for any chances of the future, particularly that future to which she still clung, as at least a possibility. But here, as on every hand, she was stopped by her sore secret.

"It is a kind offer," said she, hesitatingly, "and perhaps we may think of it when—when the boy has quite finished his education—"

"Finished his education! What more education can he get? You surely don't keep up that silly notion of his going to college? Why, that is only for lads whose parents are wealthy—heirs to estates, and so on."

"What does my boy say himself about the matter? He is old enough to have a voice in his own future." And Josephine turned to her son, who stood sullen and silent.

"No; children should never decide for themselves," said Mr. Scanlan, harshly. "You are talking, my dear wife, as if we were people of property, when in our circumstances the principal object ought to be to get the boys off our hands as quickly as possible."

"Get our boys off our hands!"

"Exactly; let them maintain themselves and cease to be a burden on their father. Why, that big fellow there eats as much as a man, and his tailor's bill is nearly as heavy as my own. I should be only too glad to see him paying it himself."

"So should I, father," said the boy, bitterly.

"Then why don't you jump at once at the chance, and say you will go to the bank?"

"Do you wish to go? Answer honestly, my son. Would you like to be a bank clerk?"

"No, mother, I shouldn't," said César, sturdily. "And what's more, as I told papa while we were walking home, I won't be one, and nobody shall make me."

"I'll make you!" cried Mr. Scanlan, furiously.

César curled his lips a little—"I think, father, if I were you I wouldn't attempt to try."

There was nothing disrespectful in the boy's manner; if it expressed any thing, it was simple indifference; César evidently did not think it worth while to quarrel with his father; and, tamed by the perfectly courteous tone, and perhaps scarcely hearing the words, the father seemed to hesitate at quarreling with his son. They stood face to face, César leaning over his mother's chair, and she clasping secretly with a nervous, warning clasp the hand which he had laid upon her shoulder. A father and son more unlike each other could hardly be. Such differences nature does make, and often the very circumstances of education and early association that would seem to create similarity prevent it. One extreme produces another.

"César," whispered his mother, "you must not speak in that way to papa and me. Tell us plainly what you desire, and we will do our best to accomplish it."

"Papa knows my mind. I told it to him this evening," said the boy, carelessly. "I'm ready to earn my living; but I won't earn it among those snobs in the Ditchley bank."

"How snobs? They are all the sons of respectable people, and very gentlemanly-looking young fellows," said the father. "Quite as well dressed as you."

"Very likely; I don't care much for my clothes. But I do care for having to do with gentlemen; and they're not gentlemen. Mamma wouldn't think they were."

"Why not?"

"They drink; they smoke; they swear; they idle about and play billiards. I don't like them, and I won't be mixed up with them. Find me something else, some honest, hard work, and I'll do it; but that I won't do, and so I told you."

And César, drawing himself up to his full height, fixed his honest eyes—his mother's eyes—full on "the author of his being," as poets and moralists would say—implying in that fact a claim to every duty, every sacrifice. True enough when the author of a child's existence has likewise been the origin of every thing that ennobles, and brightens, and makes existence valuable. Not otherwise.

"My son," said his mother, anxiously interfering, "how comes it that you know so much about these clerks at the bank? You have never been there?"

"Oh yes, I have; many times, on papa's messages."

"What messages?"

César hesitated.

"I meant to have told you, my dear," said his father, hastily, "only it concerned a matter in which you take so little interest. And it is quite separate from your bank account—and you know I am very glad you should draw and cash all our checks yourself, because then you know exactly how the money goes."

"What does all this mean?" said Mrs. Scanlan, wearily. "Money, money—nothing but money. I am sick of the very sound of the word."

"So am I too, my dearest wife; and therefore I never mention it. These were merely parish matters—money required in the school, which I have once or twice sent César to get for me."

"Once or twice, father! Why, I have been to the bank every week these two months! I have fetched out for you—one—two, let me see, it must be nearly two hundred and fifty pounds."

"You are an excellent arithmetician; would have made your fortune as a banker," said the father; and patted his son on the shoulder in a conciliatory manner. "But do not bother your mother with all this. As I told you, she is a woman, and you and I are men; we ought not to trouble her with any business matters."

"No, I'll never trouble her more than I can help," said the boy, fondly. "But indeed, mamma asked me a direct question, and to put her off would have been as bad as telling her a lie."

"Yes, my son," said Josephine, with a gasp,

almost of agony. How was she ever to steer her course? how keep this lad in the right way—the straight and narrow road—while his father—

Mr. Scanlan looked exceedingly uncomfortable. He avoided the countenances of both wife and son. He began talking rapidly and inconsequently—about the school-building and the responsibility it was, and the great deal he had to do, with nobody to help him.

"For, my dear, as a clergyman's wife, you know you are no help to me whatever. You never visit; you take no position in the parish; you inquire about nothing; you hear nothing."

"I shall be glad to hear," said Josephine, rousing herself, with a faint dread that she had let matters go too far, that there were things it would be advisable she should hear. "For instance, this money the boy spoke of—I suppose it was wanted for the school-house, to pay the architect or builder. Have you, then, nearly finished your building?"

"Why, the walls are so low I can jump over them still, as Remus did over the walls of Rome," said César, laughing; but his father turned away, scarlet with confusion.

"I won't be criticised and catechised, before my own son too," said he, angrily. "César! go to bed at once."

The boy looked surprised, but still prepared to depart; kissed his mother, and said good-night to his father; politely, if not very affectionately—Mr. Scanlan's fondling days with his children had been long done.

"Shall you want me to take that message to Mr. Langhorne, father? I'm ready to fetch and carry as much as ever you like. Only I thought I heard you tell somebody that the money subscribed was untouched. What am I to say if he asks me about the £250 you had?"

César might not have meant it—probably, shrewd boy as he was, he did not as yet see half-way into the matter—but quite unconsciously he fixed upon his father those intense dark eyes, and the father cowered before them.

"Hold your tongue, you goose; what do you know about business?" said he, sharply; and then César woke up to another fact—to more facts than it was fitting a boy of his age should begin studying and reasoning upon; especially with regard to his own father.

As for the mother, she looked from one to the other of them—these two men; for César was fast growing into a man, with all manly qualities rapidly developing in mind as in body—looked, and shivered; shivered down to the very core of her being. God had laid upon her the heaviest burden He can lay upon a woman. She had lived to see her husband stand self-convicted before the son she had borne to him.

Convicted—of what?

It was quite true she had taken little interest in this school-building; she hardly knew why, except that her interest in every thing seemed to have died out very much of late: a dull pas-

sive indifference to life and all its duties had come over her. And Edward had so many projects which never resulted in any thing. She did not believe this would, and thought little about it; indeed, the mere facts of it reached her more through her neighbors than her husband, who seemed very jealous of her interference in the matter. When his first enthusiasm had ceased, and the subscriptions were all collected and placed in the bank, he gave up talking and thinking about it.

But now she must think and inquire too, for it had appeared before her suddenly, and in a new and alarming light. The money which Mr. Scanlan had drawn out, evidently not for business purposes, whose money was it, and what had he done with it?

He had said truly that she managed all the household finances now. He left them to her, it was less trouble; and she had contrived to make ends meet—even including two journeys to London, which he said were necessary; and to which she consented more readily, seeing Mr. Summerhayes was not there. The artist had found England too hot to hold him, and disappeared permanently to Rome. No fear therefore of his further influence over that weak facile nature, with whom it was a mere chance which influence was uppermost. Except for one thing—and the wife thanked God all her days for that: Edward Scanlan's pleasures were never criminal. But what had he wanted that money for, and how had he spent it? Painful as the question was, she must ask it. To let such a thing go uninquired into might be most dangerous.

When her boy was gone she sat silent, thinking how best she could arrive at the truth. For it was always necessary to arrive at it by a sadly ingenious approximation; the direct truth her husband had never told her in his life. Even now he glanced at the door, as if on any excuse he would be glad to escape. But at eleven o'clock on a wet night even the most hen-pecked husband would scarcely wish to run away.

A hen-pecked husband! How we jest over the word, and despise the man to whom we apply it. But do we ever consider what sort of a man he is, and must necessarily be? A coward—since only a coward would be afraid of a woman, be she good or bad; a domestic traitor and hypocrite, whose own weakness sinks him into what is perhaps his safest condition—that of a slave. If men knew how we women—all honest and womanly women—scorn slaves and worship heroes, they would blame not us but themselves, when they are “hen-pecked.”

Few men could have looked less like a hero, and more like a whipped hound, than Edward Scanlan at this moment.

“My dear,” said he, rising and lighting his candle, “don’t you think you had better go to bed? It is late enough.”

“I could not sleep,” she said, irritably. She was often irritable now—inwardly at least, and

sometimes it showed outside, for she was not exactly an “amiable” woman. There was a sound, healthy sweetness in her at the core, but she was like a fruit that has never been properly shone upon, never half ripened; she set a man’s teeth on edge sometimes, as she did just now. “How you can sleep, with that matter on your mind, I can not imagine.”

“What matter, my dear?”

“Edward,” looking him full in the face, and trying a plan—a very piteous plan—of finding out the truth by letting him suppose she knew it already, “you have been doing, I fear, a very dangerous thing—drawing out for your own uses the money that was meant for your new school. When the architect and builder come to be paid, what shall you do? They will say you have stolen it.”

This was putting the thing so plainly, and in such a brief, matter-of-fact way, that it quite startled Edward Scanlan. His look of intense surprise, and even horror, was in one sense almost a relief to his wife; it showed that, whatever he had done, it was with no deliberately guilty intention.

“Bless my life, Josephine, what are you talking about? If I have taken some of the money, I was obliged, for I ran so short in London, and I did not like to come to you for more, you would have scolded me so; if I did draw a hundred or so, of course I shall replace it before it is wanted. The accounts will not be balanced for three months yet.”

“And then?”

“Oh, by then something is sure to turn up. Please don’t bother me—I have been bothered enough. But, after all, if this was in your mind—one of the endless grudges you have against your husband—I am rather glad you have spoken out. Why didn’t you speak out long ago? it would have made things much easier for me.”

Easier, and for him! Ease, then, was all he thought of? The actual dishonesty he had committed, and its probable consequences, seemed to touch him no more than if he had been an ignorant child. To appeal to him in the matter of conscience was idle; he appeared to have no idea that he had done wrong.

But his wife realized doubly both the erring act and its inevitable results. Now, at last, she not merely trembled and rebelled, but stood literally aghast at the prospect before her, at the sort of man to whom her future was linked, whom she had so ignorantly made her husband and the father of her children. In marrying, how little do women consider this—and yet it is not wrong, but right to be considered. The father of their children—the man from whom their unborn darlings may inherit hereditary vices, and endure hereditary punishments—viewed in this light, I fear many a winning lover would be turned—and righteously—from a righteous woman’s door.

But it was too late now for Josephine: her lot had long been fixed. All that she could

do was to exercise the only power she had over her husband to show him what he had done, and the danger of doing it; to terrify him, if no other means availed, into truthfulness and honesty.

"Edward," said she, "nothing will make things easy for you. It is useless to disguise the plain fact. You can not replace that money; you have none of your own wherewith to replace it. And if when the bills for the school-building fall due, it is found that you have made away with the money that was to pay them, your act will be called by a very ugly name—embezzlement."

Poor Edward Scanlan almost started from his chair. "You are joking—only joking! But it is a very cruel joke, to call your husband a thief and a scoundrel."

"I did not call you so. I believe you would not steal—intentionally; and you are far too simple for a scoundrel. But every body will not make that distinction. If a man uses for himself a sum of which he is only treasurer, and it is public money, the public considers it theft, and he will be tried for embezzlement."

Her husband had sometimes called her

"Themis," and not unlike that stern goddess she looked, as she stood over the frightened man, growing more and more frightened every minute, for he knew his wife never spoke at random, or merely for effect—as he did.

"How can you say such things to me, Josephine? But I don't believe them. They are not true."

"Then ask Mr. Langhorne—ask any lawyer—any commonly honest man."

"How dare I ask?"

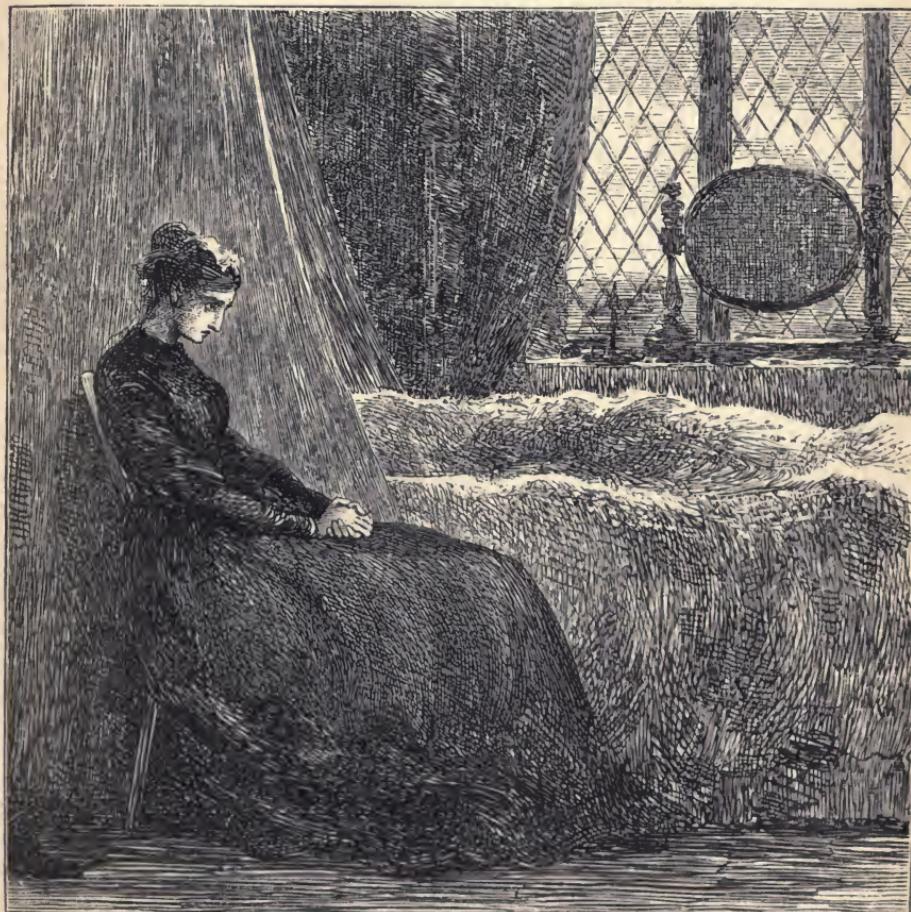
"That proves the truth of my words. If you had done nothing wrong, you would dare."

Her tone, so quiet and passionless, struck him with more dread than any storm of anger. He felt convinced his wife was right. An overwhelming fear came over him.

"Suppose it were true, suppose I could not put this money back in time, and all were to come out, what would happen?"

"You would be sent to prison, tried, perhaps transported."

"Oh, Josephine! And you can look at me and say such things—me, your own husband! Can't you help me? Have you already forsaken me?"



Quite overwhelmed, he threw himself across her knees, like one of the children, and burst into a paroxysm of childish weeping.

Poor Josephine! What could she do? Only treat him as a child—her miserable husband: soothe him and caress him in a pitying, motherly sort of way, not attempting either reproaches or reasonings, for both were equally hopeless. Evidently, what he had done had never till now presented itself to him in its true aspect; and when it did so, he was confounded by the sight. He lay, actually shaking with terror, muttering, “I shall be sent to prison—I meant no harm, yet I shall be sent to prison. And I shall die there, I know I shall; and you will be left a widow—a widow, Josephine, do you hear?”—with many other puerile moans, which she listened to without heeding much. Once or twice, with a sudden recoil of feeling, she looked keenly at him, to discern if possible how much of his agony of fear and contrition was real; or how much was contrition, and how much only fear.

Edward Scanlan was too weak to be a scoundrel, at least a deliberate one. But your unconscious sinners, perhaps, do the most harm after all, because you can use none of the ordinary weapons against them. You can defend yourself against a straightforward villain; but a man who cries “peccavi” to all you have to urge against him, who is ready to plead guilty to all the sins in the Decalogue, and commit them again to-morrow—against such a one what chance have you?

Mrs. Scanlan had none. To-night it was useless to say another word; it would be like striking a man that was down. All she could do was to calm her husband’s violent agitation—to get him to bed as quickly as possible, and then to watch by him till he fell asleep, which he did soon enough, holding fast by his wife’s hand.

Wretched wife! forlorn mother! Heaven and earth seemed leagued against her, as she sat for hours in that dull calm—alive to all which had happened or might happen—yet bound by a temporary spell, which made it all unreal. She sat, the only creature awake in the house; and scarcely stirred until dawn broke over those smooth, low hills, every outline of which she now knew so well—the hills behind which lay the invisible sea which rounded that smiling France whence her forefathers came. “Why, oh why was I ever born!” cried she in her heart.

Ah! not here, not here in this dimly seen, imperfect life, must any of us expect to find the complete answer to that question.

reason, and glad to be helped, even if he could not help himself. But no; he shirked it all. He rose, after a good night’s sleep, as if nothing were amiss, avoided every allusion to unpleasant things, and all chance of private conversation with his wife, ate a hearty breakfast, and then set off for a walk, taking César with him; evidently—this companionship of father and son being very unusual—in order to avoid César’s talking with his mother at home.

When Josephine perceived this her heart hardened. The tenderness which had come over her during the heavy watches of the night, when she sat by the sleeping man, and tried to remember that he was her husband, and she must save him, if possible, from the result of his own folly—to call it by no worse name—this softness dried up; her spirit changed within her; and the plans she had formed, the sacrifices she had contemplated for his sake, seemed but wasted labor, love thrown away.

At dinner-time Mr. Scanlan did not return, but César did, apparently of his own accord. He had not been to school, but had been occupied in delivering various notes for his father—“begging letters,” he had overheard them called in one drawing-room, while waiting in the hall—and the proud lad had gone home burning with indignation, which he tried hard not to let his mother see.

“Why should papa ‘beg?’” said he; “especially money—and I know it was money, for I had to pay it into the bank afterward; several five-pound notes.”

“They were probably for the school,” the mother said, and guessed at once that, by the common system of robbing Peter to pay Paul, which weak people are so apt to indulge in, her husband had been trying to replace his defalcations by collecting further subscriptions. She tried to find out what she could from her son, excusing herself secretly by the vital necessity there was that she should know the truth; but César was very uncommunicative. He had evidently been charged to say as little as he could of what he had done or where he had been; and, being a boy of honor, he kept faith, even though it cost him a sore struggle, for he was passionately fond of his mother. At last he said, plainly, “Please, don’t question me. If you want to know any thing, ask papa,” and stole out of the house.

Then a great fear came over Josephine—a fear which only women and mothers, who feel their awful responsibility toward the young souls intrusted to them, can understand.

There comes a crisis in many women’s lives—I mean women who have made unhappy marriages—when the wife becomes merged in the mother; and the divine instinct for the protection of offspring, which Providence has rooted in all our hearts, in some of us even deeper than conjugal love, asserts itself so strongly that every other feeling bends before it. I do not say that this ought to be—I only know that it is—

CHAPTER XI.

In spite of her long knowledge of her husband’s character, Mrs. Scanlan had expected—blindly expected—that after last night he would wake up fully alive to his position, amenable to

and I believe there are circumstances which fully justify it; for upon it depends the whole salvation of the children.

A wise and good woman once said to me, "If ever you have to choose between old and young, save the young!" Dares any one preach the doctrine—"If a woman has to choose between husband and children, save the children?" I think I dare! I give it as my deliberate opinion that when the experience of long years had killed all hope in the father, and his influence is ruining the children, the slow corruption of daily example adding to the danger of inherited temperament, the mother is bound to save her offspring from destruction; ay, even if in so doing she has to cut adrift the blazing ship upon which once all her treasure was embarked, and escape, perhaps with life only, still with life.

In what manner Josephine Scanlan came to this conclusion, during the miserable time which followed—when she tried every means to gain her husband's confidence, to win him to acknowledge that sin was sin, and not merely "ill luck," and that instead of shutting his eyes on his position he ought to look it in the face and strive to retrieve it—I do not know. But that she did come to it I am certain. Wild and terrible thoughts, nebulous at first, and then settling into a distinct purpose, haunted her day and night. If she only had her children all to herself! to earn their bread and her own by the work of her hands, and bring them up, if ever so poor, honestly; out of debt and out of danger, out of falsehood and sham religion, out of the cowardly weakness which comes to the same result as wickedness! She meant her husband no harm, she had no personal wrong to accuse him of; she only wished to escape from him, as she would escape from small-pox or scarlet-fever, or any other infectious bodily disease, with these poor little ones, whose moral health was in her hands.

I blame her not, I only pity her; and the horrible struggle she must have gone through before there even dawned in her mind the last resort of any woman who has once loved her husband—to leave him. How it was to be done, where and in what manner she could maintain herself and her children without coming upon him for one farthing—which she was determined never to do—was all cloudy at present; but the idea having once presented itself to her mind, not as a moral wrong, but a moral right, germinated there day by day.

No counter-influence came to weaken it. Her husband seemed determined to avoid her, resented the slightest interference, and fell into fits of sullenness whenever she approached, in the remotest manner, that vital point in his affairs which hung over him and his like Damocles's sword. *He* saw it not; he kept up more than his ordinary gayety, arranged a grand opening of his new schools, as public as the rector's melancholy state made possible, and accepted with supreme self-satisfaction the parish's tribute of

gratitude for his "unparalleled exertions" in the matter.

This ovation took the form of a public breakfast, to which he, his wife, and family were invited, and whither Mrs. Scanlan, with all her children, had to go and receive the congratulations of Ditchley. Dr. Waters himself—the good old man—presented the piece of plate, with much feeling, to the curate's wife; and hoped that these elegantly built schools, which did her husband so much credit, and which bore his name on the corner-stone, would carry it down to posterity, as well as his three noble boys; which speech César listened to, in silence, certainly, but with a curl on his lip not good to be seen in a boy who is listening to the praises of his father.

Yet how could the mother help it? She could not teach her son that his father was a hero, or even an honest, brave, truthful, ordinary man. She could only teach him—alas! nothing at all; but leave him to find out things for himself, and trust that God, who sometimes strangely instructs by contraries, would bring all things clear to her poor boy in the end.

And walking home that day, with her hand on his arm—César was taller than herself now—Mrs. Scanlan made up her mind.

Her son told her that within a month the school accounts were to be settled, Mr. Langhorne being appointed auditor.

"Does your father know this?" she asked, startled out of all precaution by the imminence of the danger.

"Yes," César answered; "but papa did not seem to care." And, though saying nothing, the boy showed by his manner that he guessed, plainly enough, why papa had need to care. How he had found it out the mother dared not inquire; but that he had found out, only too surely, that his father had taken and used money which did not belong to him, was sufficiently clear. Also that his young honest soul was perplexing itself exceedingly about the matter, and all the more because, from some new and unwelcome reticence, he could not speak of it to his usual confidante in all things—his mother.

Into his father's confidence he had been taken to an extent which made Josephine tremble. Indeed, with the vague fear of his children being set against him, Mr. Scanlan had of late been unusually demonstrative to them all. Uneasy as César was, it was evident that the delicate flattery of being treated as a man, and talked to upon subjects that even his mother did not know, was not without its effect—how could it be at sixteen? When she thought of this, and of what it might result in, Josephine grew half frantic.

Her husband came home an hour or two afterward, greatly exhilarated by his success. Radiant with gratified vanity, exulting in his renewed popularity, and his undoubted triumph over his High-Church brother, who had been present and seen it all, he walked up and down

the little parlor, admiring his piece of plate, and talking about himself and his doings, till, as Bridget expressed it, "you would have thought the earth was not good enough for him to stand upon. She only wondered why the master didn't spread his wings and fly away at once, to the moon or somewhere, and then the family might get their tea comfortably." So said the sharp-witted servant, feeling thus much on the matter, and no more, for of course she knew no more. But the mistress, who did know, how felt she?

First, a sensation of most utter scorn—a wish that she could hide, not only her children from their father, but their father from the children, who, she saw, were all looking at him and criticising him, with that keen, silent criticism to which youth is prone—youth, just waking up to the knowledge that the grand eidolon of parenthood is not an infallible divinity after all. By-and-by there comes a time when, parents ourselves, we begin to have a tenderness for even the broken image of what might have been a god—but not at first. The young heart is as stern as the young conscience is tender. When children cease to be worshipers they become iconoclasts.

Adrienne sat watching her father with those big, astonished, half-reproachful eyes of hers, but the rest only laughed at him. César at last rose and quitted the tea-table, slamming the door behind him, and muttering, as he passed through the kitchen, "that he didn't think he could stand this style of thing much longer." So as soon as she could, Mrs. Scanlan contrived to get her husband out of the way, to cool his head, intoxicated with laudanums, upon the breezy common.

She walked with him for a long time in silence, holding his arm, and trying to gather up her thoughts so as to put what she had to say in the gentlest and most effectual form, and to drive away from her own spirit that intense sense of disgust which now and then came over her—a sort of moral sickness, which no familiarity with Mr. Scanlan's lax ways had ever quite overcome.

We are all accustomed to have faulty kindred and friends, being ourselves, whether we think it or not, very faulty too. But what would it be to have belonging to us an actual criminal, who had not only laid himself open to the lash of the law—that sometimes falls on innocent people—but was really guilty, deserving of punishment, yet toward whom we ourselves must continue to fulfill those duties, and entertain that habitual tenderness, which guilt itself can not annul or destroy?

Mrs. Scanlan asked herself, What if any other man, any stranger, were like her Edward, and had done what he had done, how would she have felt and acted toward him? Undoubtedly she would have cut off herself and her children from the smallest association with him; have pitied him perhaps, but with a pity mingled with contempt. Now—oh the weakness

of womanhood!—though she planned quitting her husband, she did not hate him. Many pitiful excuses for him slid into her mind. He was so feeble of will, so regardless of consequences; why had Providence made him thus, and made her just the contrary—put into her that terrible sense of right and wrong which was at once her safeguard and her torment, making her jealous over the slightest errors in those she loved, and agonizingly sensitive over her own?

Perhaps she was in error now—had been too hard upon her husband; had made virtue ugly to him by over-preaching it! Then she would preach no more, but act. She had already carefully arranged a plan to get him out of his difficulty; if he agreed to it, well and good; if he refused—But further she could not look: she dared not.

"Edward"—and her voice was so gentle, that to herself it sounded like a hypocrite's—"don't go in just yet; we so seldom take a walk together!"

Mr. Scanlan assented. He was in the best of tempers, the most cheerful of moods; you would have thought he had all the world at his feet. Whatever doubts might affect him, doubt of himself never did. He talked to his wife, in a delighted vaingloriousness, of all he had done, and meant to do, with regard to the new schools.

"But are they paid for? Have you where-withal to pay? Did you replace the money you drew for yourself?"

She put the question, not accusingly, but just as a mere question, and he replied, with easy composure:

"Well—not exactly. There will be a certain deficit, which I can easily explain to Mr. Langhorne. He will never be hard upon me; me, who have worked so hard for the parish, and not been half paid from the first. It will all come right, you'll see. Don't vex yourself about so small a matter."

"A small matter!" Josephine echoed, and hardly knew whether she was dealing with a child, or a man so utterly unprincipled that he hid his misdoings under the guise of childish simplicity. "I am afraid, Edward, you are deceiving yourself. People will not think it a small matter."

"What will they think? Speak out, you most intolerable woman!"

"They will think as I think. But why repeat what I have so often said before? And we have no time for talking, we must act. César tells me—"

"What has he told you?—the simpleton!"

"Do not be afraid. Only what probably all the world knows, that Mr. Langhorne has been chosen auditor of the school accounts, and that they will be all wound up, and made generally public in a month. Is it so?"

"Oh, don't bother me! Josephine, you are always bothering! Why can't you let a man alone?"

"I would if I were not his wife, and his children's mother. Edward, just two words. Have you thought what will happen if your accounts are looked into, and found incorrect, and you can not furnish the deficit, as you call it?"

"But I shall, sooner or later. Of course I am responsible. I shall tell Langhorne so. He will hush up the matter. He would never proceed to extremities with me."

"Why not?"

"My position as a clergyman—"

"So a clergyman may do things which, if another man did, it would be called swindling! I beg your pardon"—and Mrs. Scanlan checked the passion that shook her from head to foot—"I did not mean to use hard words, but I must use plain ones. For I believe, in spite of all you say, that Ditchley might view the thing in a different light from yourself; and that Mr. Langhorne, being a remarkably honest man, and having public money intrusted to his honesty, would find himself unwillingly obliged to have you arrested for embezzlement, clergyman as you are. You would find yourself a little uncomfortable in the county jail."

Edward Scanlan started. "Nonsense! You are talking nonsense!"

"Excuse me, no! I am not speaking at random; I know it for a fact."

"How can you know it? You have not been so mad as to go and consult any body?"

"I have not. A wife must be very mad indeed before she takes any body into her counsel against her husband. But she must protect herself and her children, if she can. I borrowed a law-book, and found out from it every thing I wanted to know on that—and other subjects."

"I always said you were a very clever woman, and so you are. Too clever by half for a poor fellow like me."

Edward Scanlan's speech, bitter as it was, had an underlying cunning in it; it touched his wife's most generous point, and he knew it.

"I am not clever, I do not pretend to be," she cried, warmly. "I am only honest, and anxious to do my duty to both husband and children, and it is so hard—so hard! You drive me nearly wild sometimes. Edward, why will you not listen to me—why will you not trust me? What motive can I have in 'worrying' you, as you call it, but your own good and the children's? God knows, but for that I would let every thing go—lay me down and die. I am so tired—so tired!"

And as she stood with her face to the sunset, even its rosy glow could not brighten her wan features or her hair, in the raven black of which were mingling many white streaks. Josephine had arrived at the most painful crisis for a beautiful woman, when she is neither young nor old; not even middle-aged, which season has sometimes a comely grace of its own; but prematurely faded, like the trees after a hot summer of drought, which attempt no lovely

autumn tints, but drop at once into winter and decay.

Her husband looked at her, and saw it. He was in a vexed mood, perhaps, or else he simply said what came uppermost, without thinking, but he did say it, "Dear me, Josephine, how very plain you are growing!"

She turned away. She would hardly have been woman had the arrow not touched her heart, but it scarcely penetrated there. She had long ceased to care for her good looks, and now she was too desperately in earnest about other things to mind what even her husband thought of her. It was not till afterward that his words recurred to her memory and settled there, as bitter words do settle, long after the speaker has forgotten them. Now she simply turned the conversation back to the point in question, and discussed it as calmly and lucidly as she could.

The plan she urged was, that Mr. Scanlan should borrow, in some legal way, the sum wanting, giving as security a policy of assurance on his life, and finding a friend to guarantee his yearly payment of the same. This kindness she would herself ask of Dr. Waters, or of Lady Emma's husband. It was merely nominal, she knew; because, if Edward neglected to pay the few pounds yearly, she could do it herself; her earnings through Priscilla Nunn were still considerable. Her practical mind had laid out the whole scheme. She had even got the papers of an assurance office; there was nothing for Mr. Scanlan to do but to take the requisite steps for himself, which—he being unluckily a man, and therefore supposed competent to manage his own affairs and that of his household—nobody else could do for him. But his wife's common-sense had simplified all to him as much as possible, and her clear head succeeded in making him take it in.

It was of no use. Either he did not like the trouble—his Irish laziness always hated trouble—or else he had that curious prejudice which some weak people have against life assurance, as against making a will. Above all, he was annoyed at his wife's having done all this without consulting him, step by step, in the affair. It seemed to imply that she had her own way in every thing, which must not be. He brought in every possible argument—Apostolic or Hebraic—to prove that even to criticise or attempt to guide her husband was a dereliction from wifely duty, which he, for one, was determined to resist.

Far different was his tone the night he flung himself at her knees, and implored her to help him; but then Mr. Scanlan had been made an important personage to-day. He was like one of those

"Little wanton boys who swim on bladders," of his own vanity and egotism, and the bladders had been pretty well blown up since morning. Nothing that Mrs. Scanlan urged could in the least open his eyes to the reality of his position,

or persuade him that he was not sailing triumphantly on a perfectly smooth sea, with all Ditchley looking at and admiring him.

"Nobody will ever breathe a word against me," repeated he, over and over again. "And I dare say, if I manage him well, Langhorne will arrange so that nobody even finds the matter out. Then, of course, it will not signify."

"Not signify!"

Years ago—nay, only months ago—Josephine would have blazed up into one of her "furies," as her husband called them; her passionate indignation against shams of all kinds, and especially against the doctrine that evil was only evil when it happened to be found out; but now she indulged in no such outburst. She did not even use that sarcastic tongue of hers, which sometimes could sting, and would have stung bitterly, had she not been such a very conscientious woman. She merely echoed Edward's words, and walked on in silence. But what that silence covered it was well he did not know.

So he made himself quite comfortable, and even cheerful; satisfied that he was his own master and his wife's likewise, and had used fully his marital authority. He treated the whole subject lightly, as if quite settled, and would again have passed on to other topics.

But Josephine stopped him. Her lips were white, and her hand with which she touched him was cold as stone.

"Pause a minute, Edward, before you talk of this thing being 'settled.' It is not settled. You have a heavy time before you, though you see it not. I am very sorry for you."

"Tush—tush!" cried he, much irritated. "As if I could not manage my own affairs, and take care of myself. Do let me alone. All I ask of you is to hold your tongue."

"I will, from this time forward. Only it would not be fair, it would not be honest, if I did not tell you what I mean to do: that is, if things go on with us as they have been going on of late."

"How do you mean?"

Josephine stopped a moment to put into words, plain words, though neither imprudent nor harsh, the truth she thought it right not to keep back. Stern as her course might be, there should be at least no concealment, no double-dealing in it.

"I mean, Edward, that you and I, who always differed, now differ so widely, that the struggle is more than I can bear; for I see that it is destruction to the children. To use your own favorite text, 'two can not walk together unless they are agreed.' They had better divide."

"I am sure I have no objection. Good-night, then. I never do take a walk with you that you don't scold me," said he, perhaps willfully misunderstanding, or else, in his loose way of viewing things, he did not really catch the drift of her words.

She tried again. "I shall never 'scold' any

more; I shall not speak, but act; as seems to me right and necessary. I can not sit still and see my children ruined."

"Ruined! Why, they are getting on exceedingly well. They'll take care of themselves, never fear. Already César knows nearly as much of the world as I do."

"Does he?" said the mother, with a thrill of fear which made her more desperate than ever to say these few words—the fewest possible—which she had told herself, at all costs, she must say. "I know, Edward, children are not to a father what they are to a mother; and to you especially they have never been any thing but a burden. I therefore have less scruple in what I intend to do."

"What are you driving at? What is the meaning of all these hints?"

"I hint nothing; I say it out plain. Your ideas of honesty and honor are not mine, and I will not have my children brought up in them. I shall therefore, as soon I can, take a decisive step."

"What? inform against me? tell all Ditchley that your husband is a thief and a rogue? That would be a nice wife-like act."

"No. I shall not inform against you, and I shall never say one word concerning you to any body; I shall simply—leave you."

"Leave me! What ridiculous nonsense!"

Nevertheless, Edward Scanlan looked startled. Gentle as his wife was ordinarily, he knew well that, when roused, she had a "spirit of her own"—that she always meant what she said, and acted upon it too. And, as sometimes in his mistaken notions of propitiating her he had told her himself, he was a little afraid of his Josephine. But the idea she now suggested was too daringly untenable. His sense of outward respectability, nay, even his vanity, refused to take it in. After a momentary uneasiness he burst into laughter.

"Leave me! Well, that is the drollest idea! As if you could possibly do it! Run away, bag and baggage, with the children on your back, and Bridget trotting after. What a pretty sight! How amused Ditchley would be! And how could you maintain yourself, you silly woman? Isn't it I who keep the pot boiling?" (He did not now, but it was useless telling him so.) "Besides"—and Mr. Scanlan drew closer to his wife, and tried to put upon her "the comether," as Bridget would say, of his winning ways—very winning when he chose—"besides, Josephine, you *couldn't* leave me; you are fond of me; you know you are."

Josephine drew her breath in a gasp, and looked from her husband's face up to the face of the sky, which seemed so clear, so pure, so true! Oh! the difference between it and us, between heaven and man!

"I was fond of you," she said; "but if I were ever so fond—if you were dear to me as the core of my heart, and I had children whom you were doing harm to, whom it was necessary to save from you, I would not hesitate one

minute ; I would snatch them up in my arms and fly."

"Here's a new creed !" and Mr. Scanlan laughed still, for the whole matter appeared to his shallow mind so exceedingly absurd. "Have you forgotten what St. Paul says, 'Let not the wife depart from her husband ?'"

"St. Paul was not a woman, and he had no children."

"But he spoke through the inspiration of Scripture, every word of which we are bound to receive."

"I dare not receive it whenever it is against truth and justice," cried, passionately, the half-maddened wife. "I do not believe blindly in Scripture ; I believe in God—*my* God, and not yours. Take Him if you will—that is, if He exists at all—but leave me mine—*my* God and my Christ!"

After this outbreak, which naturally horrified Edward Scanlan to a very great extent, he had nothing to say. With him every thing was so completely on the surface, religion included—a mere farrago of set phrases which he never took the trouble to explain or to understand—that when any strong, eager soul dared to pluck off the outside coverings of things and pierce to the heart of them, he stood aghast. No Roman Catholic—one of those "Papists" whom he lost no opportunity of abusing—could believe more credulously in his Virgin Mary and all the saints than did this "gospel" curate in a certain circle of doctrines, conveyed in certain fixed phrases, the Shibboleth of his portion of the Church, upon which depended the salvation of its members. God forbid that I should allege every Evangelical clergyman to be like Edward Scanlan ; or that I should not allow the noble sincerity, the exceeding purity of life, the warm-hearted Christian fellowship, and wide practical Christian charity—oh, how infinitely wider than their creed !—of this body of religionists. But to any one like Josephine, born with a keen and critical intellect, a passionate sense of moral justice, and a heart that will accept no temporizing until it has found the perfect truth, the perfect right, this narrow form of faith, which openly avers that its principal aim is its own salvation, becomes, even when sincere, so repulsive that its tendency is to end in no faith at all.

She had occasionally horrified Mr. Scanlan by remarks like the foregoing, but this last one fairly dumfounded him. He regarded her with complete bewilderment, and then, not having a word wherewith to answer her, said "he would pray for her." No other conversation passed between them till they came to the gate, when he observed, with a patronizing air,

"Now, my dear Josephine, I hope you have come down from your high horse, and are ready for supper and prayers. Let us drop all unpleasant subjects. I assure you I am not angry with you, not in the least. I always wish you to speak your mind. All I want is a little peace."

Peace, peace, when there was no peace ! when the merest common-sense, even a woman's, was enough to show her on what a mine her husband was treading ; how at any moment it might burst at his feet, and bring him and all belonging to him to ruin in the explosion. For, shut his eyes to it as he might, excuse it as she might, his act was certainly embezzlement ; disgraceful enough in any man, doubly disgraceful in a clergyman. When it came to be known, in a community like Ditchley, his future and that of his family would be blighted there forever. The straw to which she had clung in case that other future, which she was now so thankful he had never known of, failed—namely, that on Mr. Oldham's death the living of Ditchley might be given to Mr. Scanlan, would then become impossible. Nay, wherever he went her husband would be branded as a thief and a swindler, and, justly or unjustly, the stigma of these names would rest upon his children. It might be that in her long torment about money-matters she exaggerated the position ; still it was one cruel enough to madden any honest, upright-minded woman, who was a mother likewise. A little more, and she felt it would be so ; that her mind would lose its balance, and then what would become of the children ?

"Edward," said she—and her great black hollow eyes gleamed upon him like one of Michael Angelo's sibyls (not a pleasant woman to be married to ; a Venus or Ariadne might have suited him far better)—"one word before it is too late. Peace is a good thing, but there are better things still—honesty and truth. Listen to me ; any honest man will see the thing as I see it. You must replace that money, and there is but one way—the way I told you of. Try that, however much you dislike it ; save yourself, and the children, and me. Husband, I was dear to you once."

"Don't blarney me," said he, cruelly, and turned away.

His wife did the same. That appeal also had failed. But she never altered her manner toward him. She was speaking only out of duty, but with no hope at all.

"If you can once get clear of this liability, I will go on working as usual, and making ends meet as usual. And perhaps you will try that we shall be a little more of one mind, instead of pulling two different ways, which is such a fatal thing in the master and mistress of a household. But you must decide, and quickly. We stand on a precipice which any moment we may fall over."

"Let us fall, then !" cried he, in uncontrolled irritation, shaking off her detaining hand. "For I won't insure my life, and nobody shall make me. It looks just as if I were going to die ; which no doubt I shall, if you keep on worrying me so. There, there, don't speak in your sharp tone, which always sets my heart beating like a steam-engine, and you know my father died of heart-disease, though they say sons never

take after their fathers but their mothers, which ought to be a great satisfaction to you. Never mind; when you've killed me, and are left a widow with your boys, you'll be so sorry!"

So he rambled on, in a sort of pitiful tone, but his complaints, as unreal as the bursts of carefully - arranged pathos in his sermons, affected Mrs. Scanlan very little; she was used to them. Though not robust, she always found he had strength enough for any thing he liked to do. It was chiefly when he disliked a thing that his health broke down. So his lugubrious forebodings did not wound her as once they used to do. Besides—God help her!—the woman *was* growing hard.

"Very well," she said, "now we understand one another. You take your own course, I mine. I have at least not deceived you in any way; and I have had patience—years of patience."

"Oh, do cease that dreadful self-complacency. I wish you would do something wrong, if only that you might have something to repent of. You are one of the terribly righteous people 'who need no repentance.'"

"Am I?" said Josephine. And I think—to use one of those Bible phrases so ready to Mr. Scanlan's tongue—that instant "the devil entered into her as he entered into" Judas;" and she passed into the last phase of desperation, when we cease to think whether we ought or ought not to do a thing, but only that we *will* do it.

The head of the family walked in at his front door, calling Bridget and the children to prayers, which he made especially long this night, taking occasion to bring in "Judge not, that ye be not judged;" "First take out the mote that is in thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the beam that is in thy brother's eye;" with other similar texts, all huddled together, higgledy-piggledy, in meaningless repetition, so that the first Divine utterer of them would scarcely have recognized His own gracious words.

Josephine heard them, as one who hears not—who desires not to hear. She merely knelt down, and rose up again, with the sense of evil possession, of the devil in her heart, stronger than ever; sinking presently into a sort of dull despair. Had things come to this pass? Well, then, let them come; and there would be an end.

An end!—

CHAPTER XII.

EVEN had Mrs. Scanlan wished again to reason with her husband, he gave her no opportunity of so doing. He scarcely spoke to her, or took any notice of her, but addressed himself entirely to the children; and, early next day, he started for one of his three-days' visits to a great house on the borders of his parish, where the agreeable Irish curate was

always welcome, particularly in the shooting season; when all sorts of dukes and lords "of high emprise" assembled to make war upon pheasants and partridges. Mr. Scanlan seldom handled a gun himself—it was unclerical—but he was great at a hedge-side lunch, and greater at a smoking-room conclave. Nor did he spare any trouble to be amusing; for, like a celebrated countryman of his own, he "dearly loved a lord."

When he had departed, saying loudly to Adrienne, in her mother's hearing, "that he was sure he should enjoy himself extremely"—when the house would be empty of him for three whole days (and, oh, misery! it did not feel empty, only free and clear), then Mrs. Scanlan set herself to meet the future; to ascertain, not what she ought to do, that was already decided, but in what manner she could best do it.

Deliberately, judicially, advisedly—out of no outburst of passion, no vengeance for personal wrong, but with a firm conviction that she was doing the right thing and the only thing, this woman contemplated quitting her husband—separating herself entirely from him *à mensa et thoro*, as the lawyers say, from bed and board—for life; since after such a step there is no return. Nor was she a woman ever likely to return. She had much endurance—long patience; she was slow in making up her mind, but once made up she almost never changed it—suffered from neither hesitations, recalcitrations, nor regrets, but went resolutely on to the end.

She knew her desertion of her husband would bring no opprobrium upon him; quite the contrary—the blame would probably be laid to her own door. He had broken none of the external duties of married life—was neither a profligate nor a drunkard; had kept carefully within the bounds of worldly morality, and probably the world would sympathize with him much; that is, if he made public his wife's secession, which there was no absolute necessity for him to do. "Going abroad a while for the children's education," that was the nearest and most convenient fiction to account for her absence, and this she should leave him at full liberty to use. For she had no wish either to harm him, or complain of him, or seek any remedy against him. She wanted simply to escape from him—to escape with life, and only that, for she determined to take nothing with her either of hers or the children's, except clothes. Nor would she ever ask a penny of him for maintenance; the whole income of the curacy should remain his to spend as he chose. Thus, to the best of her power, she meted out strict equity between him and herself, as well as between him and his children. They had never owed much to their father, except the mere gift of existence; henceforward she determined they should owe nothing. It would be her daily counsel to them to struggle, work, starve even, rather than ask him for any thing. In the new and terrible code which she had

laid down for herself, to which she had been driven by most cruel circumstance, no love, no generosity was possible—only stern, even-handed justice, the same on both sides. She tried to see it, and do it.

Feeling of every kind the miserable wife put aside from her entirely. Had she for one instant let the flood-gates of emotion loose, her reason, strength, and power of action would have been swamped entirely.

She knew she was acting contrary to most laws, social and scriptural, which the world believes in; but this moved her not. It was Mrs. Scanlan's peculiarity that, her conscience clear, nothing external affected her in the least; also, that if dissatisfied with herself, no praises of others satisfied her for a moment. Therefore in this her flight, from moral as from physical contagion, she consulted no one, trusted no one, but was resolved simply to take her children, and depart.

This departure must be sudden; and, of necessity, in Mr. Scanlan's absence, but she would arrange it so as to make it of as little public a nature as possible, so that he might give it whatever color he pleased. Whether for or against herself she little cared; her only anxiety was to do the right thing; nor, with that extraordinary singleness of purpose she had, did it much trouble her whether other people thought well or ill of her for doing it.

The only person to whom she meant to confide the secret of her flight, and where she would be found, was Priscilla Nunn, upon whom she depended for future subsistence. Priscilla had often lamented that Mrs. Scanlan was not in Paris, where she had lately established an agency, in which house Josephine's skillful handiwork could have earned twice the income it did here. To Paris, therefore, the mother determined to go—*la belle France*, which she had taught her children to dream of as a sort of earthly paradise, where the sun always shone, and life was all pleasantness and brightness. That every one of her young folk would be eager to go—asking no questions; for she had determined to answer none, except in the very briefest way—she had not a shadow of doubt. Her influence with her children was still paramount and entire.

Once in France, and all her own, to be brought up in the traditions of her race; in the pure Huguenot faith, such as she saw it through the golden haze of memory; in the creed of chivalry and honor which, though poor as peasants since the time of the first Revolution, the De Bougainvilles had ever held unstained—oh, how happy both she and her little flock would be!

Most of all, César, who was just reaching the age when the most affectionate of fathers and sons seldom quite agree, and nature herself gives the signal of temporary separation; after which they meet again on equal terms as man and man, neither encroaching on the rights of the other. In spite of their late alliance—more

dangerous than any quarrel—César and his father had been far from harmonious for the last year or two; and the boy had confessed that he should be only too thankful when he was out in the world “on his own hook.”

Now, César was his mother's darling. Not openly—she was too just to let partiality appear—but in her heart she built more hopes on him than on any of her children. None the less so because she saw in him the old generation revived. Josephine had had a passionate admiration for her father; so strong that it made her struggle to the last to keep sacred in her children's eyes that pitiful imitation of true fatherhood which it had been their lot to have, while she herself had been blessed with the reality. Her half-broken, empty heart clung to the image of her dead father which she saw revived in her living son—the hope that, passing over a generation, the old type might be revived, and César might grow up—not a Scanlan at all—wholly a De Bougainville.

It seemed so at present. Besides being externally so like the old Vicomte that he startled her continually by tones, gestures, modes of speech, as if it were the dead come alive again—he seemed in character to be strong, reliable, truthful, honest; every thing that his grandfather had been, and his father was not. And yet to confide in him, to enlist him against his father, was a thing at which Josephine's sense of right recoiled at once. The only thing she could do—which she was in a measure forced to do—was to learn from her son the exact footing upon which matters stood.

She did it very simply, cutting the Gordian knot by what is at once the sharpest and safest knife that any body ever can use—truth.

“César, I have some very important plans in my mind, which concern you as well as myself; they will be settled in a day or two, and then I will tell you them: in the mean time tell me every thing that has passed between you and your father. I have a right to know, and papa knows I meant to ask you.”

“Oh, I'm so glad!” cried the boy, greatly relieved, and immediately began and told every thing.

It was worse than she had anticipated, and caused her to regret, not her haste but her dilatoriness, in compelling this confidence. With the rash incontinence of speech which formed such a curious contrast to his fits of cunning reticence, Mr. Scanlan had not hesitated to explain all his affairs to his son—that is, in the light in which he viewed them. And he had for months past been in the habit, whenever he wanted money, of sending the lad about “begging,” as César irritatedly called it: borrowing from house to house small sums, on one excuse or other, till there was hardly a well-to-do family in the parish who had not lent him something, and never repaid.

“And the strange thing is,” said the boy, who, his tongue and his conscience being both unsealed, opened his whole heart to his mo-

ther, "that papa does not intend to pay, yet seems to think this not wrong at all. He says that it is the business of the parish to maintain him comfortably, and that borrowing money is only doing as the Israelites did—'spoiling the Egyptians.' Mamma, what does he mean?"

The mother answered nothing. She did not even dare to meet her boy's eyes—she only cast them upward in a kind of despair, as if taking Heaven to witness that the step she contemplated was not only right, but inevitable.

It struck her, however, that before she took it she ought to discover, not the equity—of that she had no doubt—but the law of what she was about to do: how far her rights extended, and what legal mode of defense she had, supposing her lot drifted her into that cruel position—a wife who has to protect herself against her natural protector, her husband.

That night, the children being all in bed, and even Bridget's watchful eyes at last sealed safe in slumber, Mrs. Scanlan took down a big book which she had some time ago borrowed from Mr. Langhorne, and began carefully to study the laws relating to married women and their property, in order to ascertain what her rights were: only her rights—no more.

She found what many an unfortunate wife and mother has found: that, according as the law of England then stood, and, with little modification, now stands, a married woman has no rights at all.

First—for Josephine had strength and courage to write all things down, so as to have the case as clearly before her mind as possible—unless there exists an antenuptial settlement, every farthing a wife may have, or acquire, or earn, is not hers, but her husband's, to seize and use at his pleasure. Second—that he may personally "chastise" her—"confine" her—restrict her to the merest necessaries, or treat her with every unkindness short of endangering her life—without being punishable. Third—that if she escapes from him he can pursue her, and bring her back, forcing her to live with him, and share, however unwillingly, the burden and disgrace of his wrong-doings; or, if he dislikes this, he may refuse to maintain her; while, at the same time, if she is able to maintain herself, he can swoop down upon her from time to time, and appropriate all her earnings, she having no defense whatever against him. Is he not her husband, and all hers his, no matter how acquired?

Then, as regards her children. After they are seven years old he can take them from her, denying her even access to them, and bringing them up exactly as he chooses, within certain limits, which the law, jealous of interference with paternal authority, usually makes broad enough. In fact, until they become of age, they are as much in his power as his wife is—mere goods and chattels, for whom he is responsible to no one, so long as he offends society by no open cruelty or crime.

Rich women, who can make to themselves a

barricade of trustees, settlements, etc.—those ingenious devices by which the better classes protect themselves against the law—are able to neutralize its effects a little; but for poor women, working-women, dowerless women, this is how it stands; and thus, after a long hour of half-incredulous studying, Mrs. Scanlan found it.

She sat perfectly aghast. In her ignorance she had never contemplated such a state of things. She knew marriage was, in a sense, a bondage, as all duties and ties must be more or less; but she believed it a sacred bondage, the same on both sides, or rather a partnership, in which each had equal rights, equal responsibilities, and, did either fail in the fulfillment of them, equal powers of self-defense against the wrong. For, alas! such is the imperfection of things human, that in all bonds we accept—including marriage—it behooves us not to forget the melancholy maxim, "Treat every enemy as a possible friend, and every friend as a possible enemy." And it harms no men or women who have found in a married partner their best and closest friend to know that other miserable men and women, who have proved theirs to be their direst enemy, have a refuge and protection provided for them by the law, which is a terror to evil-doers only, not to those who do well.

Josephine Scanlan, now that she knew her lot, writhed under it as if she had felt coiling round her the rings of a serpent. It bound her, it strangled her, it hissed its hot breath in her face, till she seemed nearly growing mad.

She had married—which alone implied that she had been content to merge her existence in that of her husband; that she desired no prominent self-assertion, no contradictory rights. Had her marriage turned out what marriage should be, neither would ever have thought of their rights at all, only of their duties, and scarcely even of these; for love would have transformed them into pure delights. But every union is not a happy one; every bridegroom is not what his bride believes him; nor—for let us be just—every bride what her husband hopes to find her. In such cases, what redress? For the husband, some, seeing he has the power in his own hands; for the wife, none at all. The man may be knave or fool, may beggar her by his folly, disgrace and corrupt her children by his knavery, yet she can neither cut him adrift, as he can her under similar circumstances, nor escape from him, as Josephine Scanlan desired to do.

All in vain. She found that, struggle as she might, she could not get free. Though she wanted nothing from her husband, was prepared to maintain herself and her children, not interfering with him in any way, still he had just the same rights over her, could pursue her to the world's end, take her children from her, possess himself of every thing she had—and the law would uphold him in this, so long as he kept within its bounds and committed no actual crime. There it was, clear as daylight: that

however bad a man may be, however fatal his influence and dangerous his association to those belonging to him—for nothing short of adultery or cruelty can a wife get protection against him, or succeed in separating herself from him and his fortunes.

There are people who believe this to be right, and according to Scripture. I wonder whether they would still believe it if they found themselves in the position of Josephine Scanlan?

As she sat reading, in the dead of night, with the house so still that the scream of a little mouse behind the wainscot startled her and made her shiver with nervous dread, there came over her, first a sense of utter despair, and then the frenzied strength which is born of despair. Rights or no rights, law or no law, she would be free. Nothing on earth should bind her, an honest woman, to a dishonest man; nothing should force her to keep up the sham of love where love was gone; nothing should terrify her into leaving her poor children to the contamination of their father's example. No, she would be free. By fair means or foul she would set herself free, and them likewise.

A timid woman, or one who was keenly alive to the world's opinion, might have hesitated; but Josephine was come to that pass when she recognized no law but her conscience, no religion except a blind faith that God, being a just God, would make all things right in the end. Beyond this she felt nothing, except a resolute, desperate, and utterly fearless will, that was capable of any effort and stopped by no hindrance. While she sat calculating all the pros and cons, the risks and difficulties of the course she was still as ever determined upon—only it required now cunning as well as resolution, deception instead of truth—she recalled the story of a certain Huguenot ancestress—also a Josephine de Bougainville—who, when the Catholics attacked her house, stood at its doorway, pistol in hand, with her two children behind her, and fought for them—killing more than one man the while—until she was killed herself. Josephine Scanlan would have done the same—and she knew it.

No future contingencies on the side of expediency perplexed her mind. Mr. Oldham's death might not happen for years, and when it did happen it might not affect her: the fortune might be left elsewhere. Nay, if not, what matter? As the law stood, it would not be hers, but her husband's; and he would be as unscrupulous over thousands as he had been over hundreds. Once she had thought differently, had fondly hoped that the possession of wealth would make him all right; now she knew the taint in him was ineradicable. His dishonesty, his utter incapacity to recognize what honesty was, seemed an actual moral disease. And diseases are hereditary. At least, nothing but the utmost care can prevent them from becoming hereditary. Even as a noble ancestor often stamps his likeness, mental and physical, upon unborn generations,

so does any base blood, morally speaking—for moral baseness is the only real degradation—crop out in a family now and then in the most mysterious way for generations; requiring every effort of education to conquer it—if it can ever be conquered at all.

Mrs. Scanlan's ambition for her children was altered now. Once she had wished to make them rich—now her only longing was that they should be honest. The wealth of the Indies would be worth nothing to her if they learned to use it as their father—faithless in much as he had been in little—would assuredly teach them. Better that César and Louis, and even delicate Adrienne, should earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, and earn it honestly, than that they should share any bread, even a father's, that was unrighteously gained; or grow up reckless, selfish spendthrifts, to whom wealth was no blessing, only an added curse. If it came, let him take it! she cared not. Her sole hope was to snatch up her children and fly.

That very night Josephine laid her plans, modified according to the new light which she had gained as to her legal position—laid them with a caution and foresight worthy of one of those righteous conspirators against unrighteous authority, who, according as they succeed or fail, are termed in history patriots or traitors: Some end on a throne, others on a scaffold; but I think, if they have an equally clear conscience, Heaven gives to both good rest. And good rest, strangely calm, came to Josephine's tired eyelids somewhere about dawn.

She woke with the feeling of something having happened, or being about to happen—the sort of feeling that most of us have on a marriage or funeral morning; they are strangely alike—that this day will make, for good or ill, a great gulf between the old life and the new. Nevertheless, she rose and prepared for it, as somehow or other we all do prepare, with a factitious calmness, that grows easier each minute as we approach the inevitable.

On descending to her children, the first thing she saw was a letter from Mr. Scanlan, not to herself but to Adrienne, saying he was enjoying himself so much that he meant to stay away the whole week. Therefore she had before her that week. Within it something might occur. No, nothing would occur—nothing that could save her from the act which she felt was a necessity. Only a miracle could so change things as to cause her to change; and miracles do not happen in these days.

Simple as her preparations were, she found them a little difficult to manage without exciting the suspicion of her household. At first she had intended to take Bridget with her; now she decided not. No one should be compromised by her departure: no one, until she was clearly away, should know any thing about it. Besides, in leaving Bridget behind at Wren's Nest, she left a certain guarantee that things would go on rightly there, and Mr. Scan-

lan's physical comforts be looked after, at least for the present.

For, strangely enough, up from the fathomless tragedy of her heart came floating small, ridiculous, surface things—such as who would arrange her husband's breakfasts and dinners, see that he had every thing comfortable, and do for him the thousand and one trifles which—he being either more helpless or more lazy than most men—these seventeen years she had been in the habit of doing for him? Mechanically she did them to the last; even sewing buttons on his clean shirts, and looking over his clothes for several weeks to come, till the farce and the tragedy of her departure mixed themselves together in such a horrible way, and the familiar facts of everyday life assumed such a ghastly pathos, that she felt she must shut her eyes and steel her heart, if her purpose was to be carried out at all.

Day after day slipped past; as they slip past a doomed man who has lost all hope of reprieve, yet has become not yet quite indifferent to dying—a death in the midst of life; which, so far as this world ends, is ended forever. It may be the entrance to a new life, but this life is the familiar one—this is the one he understands. Somewhat thus did Josephine feel when, night after night, she lay down in her empty, silent chamber, foretasting the loneliness that would henceforward be hers till death. Yet she never wavered. She believed she was doing right; and with her, that question being decided, no after-thought ever came.

Still, she deferred till the very last making her only necessary confidence, which was to Priscilla Nunn. Even to her it would be brief enough, merely enough to secure the faithful woman's help in Paris, and to conceal her address there from every body, including Mr. Scanlan. Further, neither to Priscilla nor to any one did she intend to explain. When we have to hew off a rotten branch to save the rest of the tree, we hew it off; but we do not sit slashing and hacking at it, and prating to all comers what harm it has done us, and the reason why we cut it down. At least, Josephine was not the woman to do this: she acted, but she never talked.

Having settled almost word for word—the fewest possible—what she had to explain to Priscilla, she started on her walk to receive from the little shop the money that was due to her—a tolerable sum, enough to take her and the children to Paris, and keep them there, at least beyond want, for a short time, till she obtained the work which, with Priscilla's assistance, she had no fear of getting. Every thing she did was done in the most methodical manner, even to the new name she meant to take—her mother's maiden name—which she did not think Mr. Scanlan had ever asked or heard.

She had hoped to go through Ditchley without meeting any one she knew, but just before she reached Priscilla's shop she was stopped by Mr. Langhorne, whom she had not seen for

some time, since the sudden friendliness which had sprung up between them after Mr. Oldham's illness had as suddenly died down—she well guessed why. From her husband's irritability whenever the lawyer was named, she knew he had tried to borrow from him, and failed: after which little episode Mr. Scanlan could never see merit in any body: so Josephine let this friend also drop from her, as she did all her friends. It was safest and best for them and for her.

Still she and Mr. Langhorne spoke kindly when they did meet, and now he crossed the street to join her. He had been calling at the Rectory, he said: had found Mr. Oldham somewhat better, and the nurse, trying to make out the poor invalid's confused speech, had caught the name of Mrs. Scanlan. Would it not be well, Mr. Langhorne suggested, for Mrs. Scanlan to go and see him?

Josephine hesitated. Great griefs had so swallowed up her lesser ones that she had not visited her poor old friend for weeks past. Now that she was quitting him too—for what must surely be an eternal farewell—she thought she ought to go and see him once more. It would be painful, for she had always kept a tender corner in her heart for Mr. Oldham; but happily he would never know the pain.

"Do you really think he wants me, or that he has begun again to notice any body? In that case I would gladly go much oftener than I do."

What was she promising, when she could fulfill nothing? when in a few days—nay, a few hours—her fate would have come, and she would have left Ditchley forever? Struck with a sudden consciousness of this, she stopped abruptly—so abruptly that Mr. Langhorne turned his keen eyes upon her; which confused her still more.

Then he said, in a somewhat formal manner, "I do not urge you to go; I never have urged you, knowing it could make no difference in any thing now. Still, if our poor friend has any consciousness—and we never know how much he has—I think it would be a kind thing for you to see him often."

"I will go at once," she said, and parting from Mr. Langhorne, took the turning toward the Rectory, passing Priscilla Nunn's door. As she passed it she was conscious of a certain relief: in being able to keep, if for only an hour longer, the bitter secret which she had hitherto so rigidly hidden from all her neighbors, which, so long as it is unconfessed, seems still capable of remedy—the misery of an unhappy marriage.

The Rectory garden looked sweet as ever, carefully tended by the honest old gardener whom Bridget would not marry. Mrs. Scanlan stopped to speak to him, and ask after his new wife, a young and comely woman, to whom, in spite of Bridget, he made an exceedingly good husband.

Yes, he was very comfortable, he said—



JOSEPHINE AND THE RECTOR.

hadn't a care in the world except for the dear master, and the grief it was to keep the garden so nice with nobody to look at it. He only wished Mrs. Scanlan would come sometimes and make herself at home there, and say what she'd like to have done in it, since perhaps, when it pleased God to take the dear master out of his troubles, she might come there for good and all.

Josephine shrank back, knowing well what the honest fellow alluded to—the common talk of the parish, that Mr. Scanlan was to succeed Mr. Oldham as rector of Ditchley. It seemed as if every word that every body said to her that day was fated to stab her like a knife.

But when she went up stairs to Mr. Oldham's room her agitation subsided, and a strange peacefulness came over her. It often did, in presence of that living corpse; which had all the quietness of death itself, and some of the beauty; for the face was not drawn or altered; and any one whom he liked to see Mr. Oldham was still able to welcome with his old smile. As he welcomed his visitor now; signaling for her to come and sit beside him, and take possession of his powerless hand.

Though there was as yet in his countenance no sign of that merciful order of release which his nearest and dearest could not but have hailed as the best blessing possible to the poor old man, still this smile of his seemed more serene than ordinary, and his eyes rested upon his visitor with a wistful affectionateness, as if he too were taking a farewell—his farewell of

her, not hers of him. In the stillness of the sick-room, Mrs. Scanlan forgot for a time every thing but her poor old friend, who had been so true to her, and so faithfully kind to her. Her personal griefs melted away, her bitter and troubled spirit grew calm. The silent land, the land where all things are forgotten, which was, alas! the only light in which she looked at the invisible world—for her husband's heaven was almost as obnoxious to her as his hell—became a less awful, nay, a desirable country. In it she might perchance find again—only perchance! for every thing connected with religious faith had grown doubtful to her—those who had loved her, and whom it had been noble, not ignoble, to love; her mother, dead when she was still a child; her father, the vivid remembrance of whom alone made her still believe in the fatherhood of God; possibly even her little infants, who had but breathed and died, and were now laid safely asleep in Ditchley church-yard. As she sat by Mr. Oldham's bed she could see their white head-stone gleam in the sunset. And she thanked God that they at least were safe, these three out of her nine.

And into this unknown land, to join this dear known company, Mr. Oldham would soon be traveling too. The puerile and altogether material fantasy, which is yet not unnatural, that she should like to send a message by him to her dead, affected her strangely. It would have been such a comfort; just one word to tell her father that she was struggling on her best

through this rough world, but would be so glad to be with him, and at peace. She sat until the tears came dropping quietly; sat, holding Mr. Oldham's hand, and speaking a little now and then, in that sad monologue which was all that was possible with him now. But still she felt less unhappy, less frozen up. The sense of filthy lucre—of money, money, money, being the engrossing subject of life, its one hope, fear, and incessant anxiety—faded away in the distance. Here, beside that motionless figure, never to be moved again till lifted from the bed into the coffin, the great truth that we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out, forced itself upon her, with a soothing strength, as it had never done before.

She might have remained longer on this, which she meant to be her last visit—only in the external calm and cheerfulness that must be kept up with Mr. Oldham it would not do to think of such things—but Dr. Waters came in, and when she rose to go home he asked her if she would accept an old man's escort over the common; it was growing too dark for a lady to cross it alone.

"Thank you," said she, touched by the kindness, and staid. For one day more she might still safely put off her arrangement with Priscilla, and so extreme was her shrinking, even within herself, from all final measures, that this was rather a relief. A relief too it was that, in bidding good-night to Mr. Oldham, she added—and sincerely meant it—"I shall come again and see you to-morrow," and so avoided the last pang of farewell.

When they went away together she asked her good friend the doctor what he thought of his patient's state, and how long it might continue. Not that this would affect her purposes in any way; for she had determined it should not; still she wanted to know.

But no medical wisdom could pronounce an opinion. Dr. Waters thought that life, mere animal life, might linger in that helpless frame for months or years, or another stroke might come, and the flickering taper be extinguished immediately. But in either case, the old man was not likely to suffer any more.

"Thank God for that!" sighed Mrs. Scanlan, with a curious sort of envy of Mr. Oldham.

She had had it before—that desperate craving for rest, only rest! as if the joys of Paradise itself would be mere weariness; and all she wanted was to lie down in the dark and sleep. There was upon her that heavy hush before a storm; before the God of mercy as well as judgment arises in lightning and thunders to rouse us out of that lethargy which, to living souls, is not repose but death. Almost before she had time to breathe the storm broke.

"Mrs. Scanlan," said Dr. Waters, suddenly, pressing her hand with a kindly gesture, for he knew her well, had been beside her in many a crisis of birth and death, and was well aware, too, though he never referred to it, how faith-

fully she had kept his own miserable domestic secret in years past—"Mrs. Scanlan, where is your husband to-day?"

She told him.

"I am glad. A week's amusement will be good for him. He is quite well, I hope?"

"Perfectly well."

One of those shivers which superstition calls "walking over one's own grave" ran through Josephine. Did Dr. Waters suspect any thing? Or was it only her own vague terror, which had made her feel for weeks past as if she were treading on a mine, that she discovered in his words something deeper than ordinary civility? Had he discovered any thing of her husband's misdoings? She feared, but her fear was altogether different from the reality. It came soon.

"I walked home with you to-night, partly that I might say a word to you about your husband. You are too sensible a woman to imagine I mean more than I say, or to give yourself groundless alarm."

"Alarm!" she repeated, her mind still running in the one groove where all her misery lay. "Tell me quickly; do tell me."

"Nay, there is really nothing to tell: it is merely a harmless bit of precaution. You are aware that your husband consulted me the other day about effecting an assurance on his life?"

She was not aware, but that mattered little. "Go on, please."

"He said you were very anxious he should do it, and he had refused, but, like the disobedient son in the parable, afterward he repented and went. You wished it, he added, as a provision for yourself and the children."

"I! Provision for me and the children!" Even yet she had not grown accustomed to her husband's startling modifications of facts.

The quick-witted physician saw her angry confusion, and tried to help her through it. "Well, well, it was something of the kind. I can not be very accurate, and I never interfere in family affairs. All I want to urge upon you is, unless there is some very urgent necessity, do not let him try to insure his life."

"Why not?" said she, facing the truth in her direct, almost fierce way.

"Because I am afraid no office would take him. He has—this need not frighten you; hundreds have it; I have it myself, and you see what an old man I have grown to—but he has confirmed disease of the heart."

"Oh, Doctor!"

This was all she said, though the bolt, God's own bolt of terror, sent to rouse her from her lethargic despair, had fallen in her very sight. In all her thoughts about her husband the thought of his death had never crossed her imagination. He seemed one of the sort of people who live forever, and enjoy life under all circumstances; being blessed with an easy, temper, a good digestion, and no heart to speak of. That he, Edward Scanlan, should bear about with him a confirmed mortal disease, and

not feel it, not know it; the thing was impossible; and she said so vehemently.

Dr. Waters shook his head. "It is a very good thing that he does not know it, and he never may, for this sort of complaint advances so slowly that he may live many years and die of some other disease after all. But there it is, and any doctor could find it out—the doctor of the assurance company most certainly would. And if Mr. Scanlan, with his nervous temperament, were told of it, the consequences might be serious. Therefore, I tell his wife, who is the bravest woman I know, and who can keep a secret better than any other woman I know."

"Ah!" feeling that upon her was laid—and laid for life—another burden. No lying down to rest now; she must arise and bear it. "What must I do? What can I do?" she said at last.

"Nothing. Forewarned is forearmed. Telling you this seems cruel, but it is the best kindness. Cheer up, my dear Mrs. Scanlan. I am sure you have looked so ill of late that your husband may live to bury you yet, if that is what you desire. Only take care of him; keep him from overexcitement, and above all from assurance offices."

"I understand. I will remember. Thank you. You are very kind."

Her words, brief and mechanical, were meant as a good-by, and Dr. Waters took them as such, and left her at the gate of Wren's Nest without offering to go in. Nor did she ask him; the strain upon her was such that, if it had lasted another ten minutes, she felt as if she would have gone mad.

She sat down, a few yards only from her own door, behind a furze-bush on the common, which lay all lonely and silent under the stars, and tried to collect her thoughts together, and realize all she had heard.

I have said that in the noblest sense of love, clear-eyed, up-looking, trustful, that ever loves the highest, Mrs. Scanlan had ceased to love her husband. Natural affection may revive by fits and starts, and a certain pitiful tenderness is long of dying; but that a good woman should go on loving a bad man, in the deep and holy sense of woman's love, is, I believe, simply impossible. If she did, she would be either a fool—or something worse. But often, when love is dead and buried, duty arises out of its grave, assuming its likeness, even as the angel assumed that of King Robert of Sicily, till one can not tell which is the king and which the angel; and over this divine travesty we may weep, but we dare not smile.

The Edward Scanlan of to-day was in nowise different from the Edward Scanlan of yesterday. And yet his wife felt that her relation to him was totally changed. So long as he was well and happy, gayly careering through life, indifferent to every body but himself, selfish, unprincipled, dishonest, and yet of that easy nature that he would always contrive to fall on his feet, and reappear on the best terms with every body; then she felt no compunction at

quitting him: nay, her desertion became a righteous act. But now? Every noble, tender, generous feeling in the woman's breast revolted at doing the very thing which an hour before she had been resolved upon.

This change seemed hardly her own act—at least she did it more by instinct than reasoning; indeed, she hardly reasoned at all about it, or paused to consider whether, in thus totally ignoring her past resolve, she needed to blame herself for having ever made it. The thing was now impossible; that was enough. While desperately pursuing one course, fate, or circumstance, or Providence, had seized her with a strong right hand, and flung her upon another.

"I can't go away," she said, and rocked herself to and fro, with sobs and tears. "I must 'take care of him,' as Dr. Waters told me. What could he do without me? What should I do if he wanted me, and I were not there?"

This was all she thought, all she argued. Her single-minded nature took all things simply, without morbid introspection, or needless self-reproach. Indeed, she hardly thought of herself at all in the matter, until there suddenly flashed across her the remembrance of the children—and for a minute or two her head was in a whirl, and she was unable to see the path of duty clearly. Only duty. No sentimental revulsion of feeling drew her back to the days when the children were not, and her young lover-husband was to her all in all. Those days were dead forever; he had himself destroyed them. She never for a moment disguised from herself that her children—those "incumbrances," as Mr. Scanlan often called them—were infinitely dearer to her than he. She must save her children, but was she to do it by forsaking their father?

"Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Most true—not man. But there are cases when God Himself does it; when with His righteous sword of division He parts the wicked from the innocent, the pure from the impure. The difficulty is for our imperfect mortal vision to see this, to recognize the glitter of that sharp, inevitable sword, and acquiesce in the blow of the invisible Hand.

Josephine attempted it not. Nor do I attempt to judge her either in what she did or what she did not do; I only state the result—that her communication with Priscilla Nunn was never made; and it was not until both were dead that any one ever knew how near she had been to quitting her husband forever.

For more than an hour Mrs. Scanlan sat crouched under that furze-bush, open only to the gaze of the stars, forever marching on in their courses, irresistibly, remorselessly, taking no heed of any one of us all. Then, impelled by a vague consciousness that the night was very chilly, that if she took cold she should be ill, and if she were ill, what would become of the household, she rose and went indoors.

Not to the children, though she heard their voices at play in the parlor, but up at once to her own room. There, in passing, she rested her hand upon the pillow where her husband's head had lain for seventeen years, turned round, stooped, and kissed it.

"I will not go," she said. "Who will hold fast to him if I do not? No, I'll not go."

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. SCANLAN had full time for reconsidering her determination, had she been so inclined, for her husband did not return on the day he had named. Not even though she sent on to him a note from Mr. Langhorne, urgently requesting the settling of the school accounts. Evidently he had put off to the last extremity possible the fatal crisis, and was afraid to meet it even now. She was not, though she knew it must come, and soon; but it only confirmed her resolution not to quit him.

Women are strange creatures—I, a woman, say it. Men think they know us; but they never do. They are at once above us and below us, but always different from us, both in our good points and our bad.

Josephine had never had any real happiness in her husband; neither comfort, nor trust, nor rest. Fond of her he undoubtedly was, even yet; but it was a man's sort of fondness, beginning and ending in himself, from the great use and support she was to him. Unto her he had been a perpetual grief, a never-ceasing anxiety; yet the idea of losing this, of letting him go and doing without him, or rather of allowing him to do without her, presented itself to her now as a simple impossibility. The tie which bound her was not love—I should profane the word if I called it so—but a stern, heroic, open-eyed faithfulness; seeing every one of the thorns of her most difficult way, yet deliberately following it out still. Her life henceforward must be one long battle; no quiet, no pause, no lying down to that longed-for rest. "No peace for the wicked," said she mockingly to herself oftentimes, but took little thought whether it applied to her, whether she was righteous or wicked. One thing she knew she was, and must be—bold. Courage was her only chance now.

After discovering that as a married woman she had no legal rights, and no help or aid was possible from any one, she had determined to take the law into her own hands, and protect herself as well as she could—both by boldness, and, if necessary, by the quality which in woman is called cunning, in man only diplomacy. This was the easier, because, as she well knew, her husband's prominent characteristic was cowardice. He was always afraid of somebody or something, and not unfrequently afraid of himself. He had no persistent will at all; it was a joke among the children that if ever papa talked about a thing he was quite certain not

to do it, and whatever he did was done by accident. Thus his wife knew that when it came to the point she was twice as strong as he.

Her plan of action had been very simple: to leave home, as if for a short journey; to cross over at once to Paris, and there, assuming a French name, to pass off herself and her children as French returned refugees. If she obtained work, and was unpursued, she meant to remain in Paris; otherwise to fly to the New World, or Australia—any where—so that she had her children, and could escape her husband. Great as his power was over her and them legally, morally it was but small; for tyrant and victim change places when the one has the soul of a lion and the other that of a hare; and a mother, driven to despair, with her children to guard, has always something of the lioness in her, which makes her rather a dangerous animal to deal with.

Tragical as was the pass she had come to, there was a certain comfort in it—a power in her hands of which she knew she could at any time avail herself; her refuge was not her husband's strength, but his cowardice. And now that she had changed her mind, and resolved not to leave him, but to stay and meet the worst, she hoped that the same courage which would have thrown him off, and withheld him at a distance, might keep him in bounds while near. She could trust him no more, believe in him no more; she stood quite alone, and must defend herself and her children alone; still, she thought she could do it. She must look things boldly in the face, and act accordingly. There must be no weak yielding to what was doubtful or wrong; no pretense of wifely duty, to "love, honor, and obey"—because when the first two do not exist, the third becomes impossible—a ridiculous, unmeaning sham. Neither must there be, as regarded the children, any setting up of superstitious filial fetishes, only to be kicked down again, as all false gods ultimately are. If her children found out, as they often did, that their father had told them a lie, she must not mask it, or modify it, as often she had done, to avoid exposing him. She must say distinctly, "It is a lie, but he can not help it; it is his nature not to be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Pity him, and tell the truth yourselves." The same in that terrible laxity of principle he had as to money-matters, and the hundred other crooked ways in which he was always walking; where, rather than see her children walk, she would see them—she often prayed that she might see them!—drop one after the other into their quiet graves. (Did God, not in anger, but in mercy, answer her prayer? I can not tell. Her lot was hard, but it might have been harder.)

While resolving that, in any moral crisis of this sort, she would have no hesitation whatever in opening her children's eyes to the errors of their father, she still thought she should be able to keep them to their strict duty, and teach them to honor—not the individual parent,

that was impossible—but the abstract bond of parenthood; so beautiful, so divine, that the merest relics of it should be kept in a certain sort of sanctity to the last by every human being.

It was a difficult, almost a superhuman task that Mrs. Scanlan was setting herself; but it was easier than the only two other alternatives—of succumbing entirely to evil, or, by flying from it, forsaking her husband, and leaving him to trouble, shame, sickness, death—all alone.

That the collapse of his affairs must soon come, she was certain. She hardly thought he would be prosecuted, but he would be driven from Ditchley a dishonest man, his clerical work at an end forever. Therefore upon her alone would thenceforward rest the maintenance of the family; even as she had intended, but with the additional burden of her husband. What matter? She had long ceased to look forward, at least in any happy way. Her hopes had all turned to despair, her blessings to misfortunes. Even that possible fortune, the prospect of which had so long upheld her, had it not been less a blessing than a curse? But for it, and its numbing effect upon her, she might have striven more against Mr. Scanlan's recklessness, or have risen up with a strong will, and taken into her own hands the reins which his were too weak to hold. But the gnawing of this secret at her heart had given her a sense of guiltiness against him, which had made her feeble of resistance, indifferent to the present in the hope of the future. But why regret these things? It was all too late now.

She was sure trouble was at hand when, on Sunday morning, Mr. Scanlan had not come home, and she had at the last minute to send César about in all directions to get some friendly clergyman as his substitute. That being done, and her fears roused, lest, urged by the pressure of circumstances, or some sudden fear of discovery, he might actually have left the country, the curate walked in—crawled in, would be the better word; for he had an aspect not unlike a whipped hound. Afraid lest the children should notice him, their mother hurried them off to church, and took him straight up stairs; where he threw himself down upon the bed in a state of utter despondency.

"It's all over with me; I knew it would be. You refused to help me, and so it has come to this!"

"Come to what?" said Josephine. He had not asked, nor she given, any welcoming caress, but she had followed him up stairs, and done various little duties that he expected of her. Now she stood beside him, pale, quiet, prepared for whatever might happen.

"That fellow Langhorne will wait no longer. He insists upon having the books, to go into them next week. And the money is gone, and I can't replace it. So I am ruined, that's all."

"Yes."

"I have done the best I could," added Mr. Scanlan, in an injured tone. "I even took

your advice, and went to Dr. Waters about insuring my life, and he promised to inquire. But he too has played me false. I have heard no more from him. All the world has forsaken me—I am a lost man. And there you are, dressed in all your best, looking so nice and comfortable; I dare say you have been very comfortable without me all week—going to church too, as if nothing was the matter. Well, then, go! Leave me to my misery, and go."

To all this, and more, Josephine made no reply. She was too busy watching him, trying to read in his face something which might either confirm or refute Dr. Waters's opinion concerning him. She did see, or fancied she saw, in spite of his florid complexion, a certain unwholesome grayness, and wondered, with a sharp twinge of self-reproach, that she had never noticed it before. It was no dearer to her, no nobler, this handsome, good-natured, and yet ignoble face; but she regarded it with an anxious pity, mingled with thankfulness, that she alone bore, and had strength to bear, the secret which would have overwhelmed him. For though, in truth, it was no worse for him than for all of us—we every one carry within us the seeds of death, and we are liable to it at any minute—still, to such a weak nature as Edward Scanlan's, and one who, despite his religious profession, shrank with dread from every chance of that "glory" which he was always preaching, the knowledge of such a fact as heart-disease concerning himself would almost have killed him with terror on the spot.

So once again his wife took up his burden, and bore it for him—bore it all alone, to the very end.

"Then you are not going to church, after all?" said he, when, lifting his head, he perceived that her bonnet was laid aside, and she was sitting quietly by him. "Now that's kind of you, and I am glad. Only, will not the congregation think your absence rather peculiar?"

"Oh, I do not care for that."

"But you ought to care," said he, with sudden irritability. "I know I should have got on twice as well in the world if I had had a wife who minded outside things a little more."

Josephine flushed up in anger, then restrained herself. "Perhaps so," she answered. "But, Edward, if I have not been a show wife, I have been a very practical and useful one, and I am willing to be of use now if you will let me."

"That's my good Josephine! Then we are friends again? You won't forsake me? I half thought you would. I have had such horrible fancies every night, of being arrested and sent to jail, and dying there, and never seeing you any more. You won't let it come that? You wouldn't like to have your husband shut up in a prison, among all sorts of nasty, unpleasant people—oh, it would be dreadful! dreadful! You'll try to save me from it, Josephine?"

For ever so long he went maunding on

thus, in an almost puerile fashion, not venturing to look his wife in the face, but clinging fast to her hand.

A man must be a man to compel a woman's love. For a moment Josephine turned aside, and her sweet, proud, delicate mouth—the De Bougainville mouth, descending from generation to generation—even César had it—assumed a curl that Mr. Scanlan might not have liked to see; except that he would never have understood it. But immediately that deep pity, which long survives love, arose again in the wife's heart.

"My dear, we will not talk of prisons; perhaps it will not come to that. I might be able to devise some plan, if you would now tell me every thing. Mind, Edward—every thing!"

"I have told you every thing—except, perhaps, of my visit to Dr. Waters, which was quite a sudden idea. But it came to nothing, you see, as is always the case with me. Never was there such an unlucky fellow in this world."

This was his constant cry; but she had ceased arguing against it now. She had ceased even to torture herself by counting up that large measure of happiness that might have been theirs—youth, health, children, settled work, and an income which, if small, was certain, and would have sufficed them to live on in comfort; but for that fatal something—the one rivet loose in the wheel—which her husband called his "ill luck!"

"Well, why are you silent? What are you thinking about? What do you suggest? For I tell you, Josephine, we are come to the last ebb—all is over with me, unless I can arrange about the assurance at once, say to-morrow. Come, you shall have your wish. I'll go to the assurance office to-morrow."

Josephine's heart stood still. Then, looking another way, she said, "It is not my wish now; I have changed my mind. I do not want you to assure your life."

"Well, that is a good joke! After worrying me to death about it, abusing me like a pickpocket because I wouldn't do the thing, as soon as I decide to do it, you turn round and say you don't wish it at all! You are the most fickle, changeable woman—but you women always are: there's no making you out."

Josephine was silent.

"Unless"—with a sudden flash of that petty cunning which small natures mistake for penetration, and often fancy themselves very clever in attributing to others motives they would have had themselves—"unless, indeed, you have some deep-laid scheme of your own for managing me. But I won't give in to it; I won't be managed."

"Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" murmured Josephine, using the exclamation not lightly, as many Frenchwomen do—she had been brought up too strictly Huguenot for that—still using it without much meaning, only as a blind cry of misery in a tongue that her husband did not understand. "Listen to me, Edward," she

said, earnestly. "I have no deep-laid scheme, no underhand design. How should I have? My whole thought is for your good. It is true I have changed my mind; but one may do that sometimes, and find second thoughts best after all. This life assurance would cause you so much difficulty, so much trouble; and you know you don't like trouble."

"I hate it."

"And if I were to take the trouble from you—if I were to find a way of arranging the matter myself—"

"Oh, I wish you would, and let me never hear another word about it," said he, with a look of great relief, all his offended dignity having subsided in the great comfort it was to have his burden taken off his hands. "You are the cleverest woman I ever knew. You may have it all your own way, if you like; I won't interfere. Only just tell me, as a mere matter of curiosity, my dear, how you mean to accomplish it."

It was a way which had slowly dawned upon her as the best—absolutely the only way to meet this crisis—by the plain truth. She meant to go over the accounts herself—when first she married she hardly knew that two and two made four, but she was a very respectable arithmetician and book-keeper now—discover the exact deficit, and then confess it, simply and sorrowfully, to Mr. Langhorne. He was a very good man: she believed, if dealt with frankly, he would take the same view of things that she did—that her husband's act had been excessive carelessness rather than deliberate dishonesty. If it could be "hushed up"—oh, the agony it was to this honest woman that any thing concerning any one belonging to her required to be hushed up!—for a time, she might be able to repay the money by settled monthly installments out of her own earnings. Any thing, every thing, that she could do herself, she felt safe about; but all else was like shifting sands. Still, she thought Mr. Langhorne would trust her, and, slender as her relations with him had been, she had always found him kind and just: the sort of man upon whose generosity she might throw herself, and not feel it pierce her like a reed.

But when she tried to explain all this to Mr. Scanlan, he was perfectly horrified! The direct truth was the last thing he ever thought of. Acknowledging a sin, and then resolving to retrieve it—the only way to reconcile justice and mercy, without which forgiveness becomes a sham, and charity mere weakness—was an idea quite beyond his comprehension. He only wished to hide guilt, to plaster it over, to keep it from the eye of the world; and then go on cheerfully as if it were not there. So as he escaped punishment, he was quite satisfied.

"No, Josephine," said he, with the pig-headedness of all feeble souls; "this won't do. The notion is perfectly absurd! What would Langhorne think of me? what would he think of you, owning that your husband had taken the

money? No—no! If you are to help me, as you said you would, you must find out some other way to do it."

"There is no other way," she answered, still calmly, though she knotted her fingers together in desperate self-control, and looked down at them, not at the face beside her, lest perchance she should loathe it—or despise it, which is worse even than loathing. "I have thought it all over and over, till my head has gone nearly wild, and it all comes to this: if you refuse to do as I suggest, or rather let me do it, there is nothing but ruin before you—ruin and disgrace."

"The disgrace will not fall upon my head alone," said he, almost triumphantly. "You should think of that before you forsake me. It will come upon you too, and the children."

"Ah! I know that!" groaned the unfortunate wife; and could have cursed the day when she had been so mad as to marry—could have envied with her whole soul the childless women whom she had once used to pity. They, at least, had one consolation—with them their miseries would end. They need not fear entailing upon innocent posterity the curse of a moral taint worse than any physical disease.

Bridget Halloran once made to me a truly Irish remark—that, if she had the planning of a new world, she would arrange it so that all the men married and all the women remained single. Could faithful Bridget that day have looked through her kitchen ceiling at her dear mistress, I think she would have been strengthened in her opinion. It is not good for man to be alone, or woman either; but in that awful leap in the dark which both make when they marry, the precipice is much deeper on the woman's side. A lonely life may be sad, but to be tied to either a fool or a scoundrel is not merely sad, it is maddening.

Josephine Scanlan looked half mad; there was a glare almost amounting to frenzy in her black eyes, as she sat pulling to and fro, up and down, till she almost pulled it off her finger, the thin gold circlet, origin and sign of so many years of unhappiness past, of untold wretchedness to come. Once more the desperate chance of retrieving all by flight flashed across her mind, and vanished. To leave him there, in his lowest ebb of ill fortune, forlorn, dishonored, unconsciously doomed. It would be what to Josephine seemed almost worse than wicked—cowardly.

"I can't go," she said to herself. "Perhaps, if I have patience, I may see a way out of this. Oh, if I had any one to show it to me, to help me in the smallest degree! But there is no one—no one in this wide world."

And so, by a strange and sudden thought—one of those divine promptings that none believe in but those who have them—the miserable woman was driven to seek for help beyond this world. She covered her face with her hands, and did—what Josephine seldom did for herself, though she taught it to her little

children as a sort of necessary duty every night—she "said her prayers;" using her children's formula, "Our Father which art in heaven." In heaven—and oh so far, so terribly, cruelly far, as it seemed to her—from this forlorn earth!

The doctrine of "answers to prayer," literal and material, always appeared to me egregious folly or conceited profanity. Is the great Ruler of the universe to stop its machinery for me? Is the wise evolution of certain events from certain causes, continuing unerringly its mysterious round, by which all things come alike to all, and for the final good of all—to be upset in its workings for my individual benefit? No; I would not, I dared not believe such a thing. But I do believe in the Eternal Spirit's influence upon our spirits, in momentous crises, and in a very distinct and solemn way, often remembered for years* as Mrs. Scanlan afterward remembered this.

At the very moment when she sat hiding her face, and trying to feel if there was any reality in the prayers she had silently uttered, she heard through the silence the far-off sound of Ditchley church bell. Not the church-going bell—it had ceased an hour or more ago—but the slow measured toll by which the parish was accustomed to learn that one of their neighbors had just departed—gone into that world of which we talk so much and know so little.

"That's the passing-bell!" cried Mr. Scanlan, starting up. "Who can it be for? Just count the tolls."

For in Ditchley, as in some other parishes in England, it was customary to ring out the number of tolls corresponding to the age of the person who had died.

Josephine counted up to eighty; past it. There was scarcely any one in Ditchley of such advanced years, except the rector. She sat stupefied. Her husband also, with a certain kind of awe in his face, again felt for her hand, whispering, "Can it be Mr. Oldham?"

Two minutes after she heard the children come in, much too early, from church. Adrienne and Gabrielle were both in tears, and César, looking very grave, repeated the tidings which had reached the church during sermon-time, and been communicated from the pulpit, sending a thrill of solemnity, if nothing more, throughout the congregation.

Mrs. Scanlan heard, and sat down where she stood, as white and still as a stone. The end had come at last, of suffering to him, of suspense to her: Mr. Oldham was dead.

He had died quite quietly and unexpectedly, César said; for the boy, knowing his mother was fond of their old friend, had had the thoughtfulness to run up at once to the Rectory and inquire all particulars. There was no struggle, no apparent pain. The spirit had escaped, like a bird out of its cage—spread its invisible wings, and flown away. Did it look back, smiling, on that poor woman, come now to the very last ebb of her despair?

Actual grief for Mr. Oldham's death was im-

possible. It was scarcely one of those departures when friends hang over the bed of the beloved lost,

"Not thankful that his troubles are no more."

Here, even the tenderest friend must rejoice that his troubles were no more; that he was released from the heavy clog of the body, and from a life which could never be any joy or use to himself or others—only a miserable burden and pain. For, sad as it is to see a still youthful mind writhing in the fetters of a worn-out, aged body, sadder still is the climax which must soon have come to poor Mr. Oldham, when the body outlives the mind, and the thing we at last bury seems only a body, a mere clod of the valley, a helpless corruption, better hidden out of sight. In such circumstances it is difficult to regain the feeling* of still-existent spirit, separate from clay. It is only after a while, as the associations of sickness and mortality grow fainter, that the dead seem to come alive again, in all their old identity; and the farther years part us from them, the nearer they appear. Not as dead and buried, but as living dwellers in a far country, to which we too are bound, and for which we wait patiently, even cheerfully, hearing, louder and clearer as we approach thereto, the roll of the dividing seas.

When the first awe was over—the first natural tears shed for the dead who could return no more—an unwonted lightness crept into Josephine's heart. Her present terror was at any rate staved off; Mr. Langhorne would be for some weeks too much engrossed in the arrangement of Mr. Oldham's affairs to go into the school accounts, and meantime what changes might not come? Might it not possibly be true, that golden dream which had grown so dim through long delay? Could she be the rector's heiress after all?

A week ago she had thought her misery rendered her indifferent to this, and all things else that might befall; but human nature has wonderful powers of reaction, and Josephine's nature especially. In her there was an irrepressible hopefulness which nothing could kill. Still this very hope made her suspense the more intolerable.

Her promise to Mr. Oldham bound her literally only till his death; she was therefore free now to unburden all her hopes and fears to her husband. But she never thought of doing so. Even had there been no other reason, the horrible strain it was upon her own mind during the interval that elapsed between the death and the funeral—for Mr. Langhorne and Dr. Waters, who, as executors, took every thing into their hands, insisted upon waiting a week for Lady Emma and Mr. Lascelles, neither of whom came after all—this week of miserable restlessness, during which she could do nothing, think of nothing, but calculate the chances of her fate, convinced Josephine that she must preserve her secret to the last. If it

came to nothing, the shock would be more than Mr. Scanlan could bear. If it were true, he would be a little angry with her perhaps; but no—the husband of an heiress, especially when he is a man like Edward Scanlan, was not likely to be very angry with his wife, or for very long.

And during this interminable week, when the rector lay dead—nay, rather, as Josephine often tenderly said, was truly alive again—the curate seemed to appear his best self, both at home and abroad. Perhaps he was anxious to cultivate his chances of the living, or perhaps—let us give him credit for the best motive possible—he was really touched by the death which, he could not help seeing, affected his wife so much. He was very little at Wren's Nest, to her great thankfulness; he had of course much additional business to transact, but whenever he did come home he was good and kind. And he never made the least allusion to the impending storm; which, perhaps, being temporarily lifted off, he deluded himself would never come; that, in his usual phrase, something would "turn up" to protect him from the consequences of what he had done amiss. That was all he cared for. His life was an appropriate carrying out in this world of the belief he held regarding the other—the all-importance of what is termed "personal salvation"—a doctrine held by many true and sincere Christians, which only proves that they themselves are far nobler than their doctrine, and that the spirit of God within us is a diviner thing than any external and nominal creed.

It showed the extreme self-control to which Josephine, so impulsive and passionate in her youth, had attained, that even the quick-sighted Bridget noticed nothing remarkable in her mistress during this momentous week, at least nothing more than great quietness of manner, and a wish to escape observation and be as much alone as possible. She remained in the closed house—closed out of respect to the departed; and scarcely quitted it until after dark, when she would rush for a hasty walk across the common, refusing even her son César's company. Perhaps an eye more familiar than the poor servant's with the signs of mental suffering might have noticed how thin she grew in those seven days—what a tension there was in her features—what an unnatural metallic ring in her voice; but at the time no suspicion was roused; she kept her secret faithfully to the last.

The week's end came at length. The final night—the night before the funeral—Mrs. Scanlan slept as soundly as a child, or a criminal before execution; only she had no feeling of guilt, whatever happened. Her act of concealment had been deliberate, conscientious; if it were all to do over again, she felt she could but have done the same thing under the same circumstances. Believing this, she was utterly indifferent to praise or blame, either from her neighbors, or those of her own house-

hold. The only matter of moment which troubled her was the fact itself—so long a certainty though unknown—but which in a few hours must be known to herself and all the world—the little busy world of Ditchley.

She had been invited to the funeral, as companion to Lady Emma, who at first had wished to go, but afterward declined. Mr. Langhorne had also expressed formally a wish that Mrs. as well as Mr. Scanlan should be present at the reading of the will; but at the last moment her husband declared she should not go.

"Why not?" asked she.

"Oh, Lady Emma's absence shows she thought it not decorous for ladies to attend funerals, and I think so too," said the curate, dogmatically; and after a good deal of beating about the bush, he came out with his second reason—her mourning was not handsome enough. Not daring to run into debt for a new gown, she had made an old one do. As she stood in it, its long folds clinging tightly to her wasted, rather angular figure, her husband looked sharply, critically, at his once beautiful wife. If her beauty had been the sole spell that enchain'd him, Edward Scanlan was a free man now.

"What a fright you do make of yourself sometimes, Josephine! I wish you wouldn't. I wish you would remember it is my credit that depends on your appearance. When you dress shabbily it is a reflection upon me. Indeed you can not go as you are to the funeral. It would be a want of respect to Mr. Oldham."

"He would not feel it so; he knew me better," she answered, gently. "And I should like to see him laid to rest; should like to come back with you to the Rectory and hear his will read."

"Nonsense; it can not concern us. He liked me so little of late, I doubt if he has even left me ten pounds to buy a mourning-ring. I must go, I suppose, as a mere matter of form, but you need not. Women are far better out of all these things."

Josephine grew seriously troubled. Her presence at the funeral was not necessary, but at the reading of the will undoubtedly it was. Not to shorten her own suspense—that mattered little—but to "take care," as Dr. Waters had said, of her husband; to whom any shock of sudden tidings, either good or bad, would be very injurious.

"Edward," she said, "I want to go. Don't hinder me. It can not signify to you."

Yes, he protested, it did signify. People might make remarks; might say that Mrs. Scanlan pushed herself where she had no business to be, and that Mr. Scanlan was always tied to his wife's apron-string. He insisted upon her staying at home. There had come over him one of those dogged fits, peculiar to

he got into this mood—common to human beings and asses—Edward Scanlan could neither be led nor driven, but was bent upon taking his own way, just because it was his own way.

Josephine sat down in despair. To thwart her husband's will openly was impossible, to submit to it most dangerous. As he dressed himself carefully in his new black suit and unexceptionable white cravat—whosoever went shabby at Wren's Nest, its master never did—talking complacently all the while of his own popularity, of the universal wish there was that he should step into the dead man's shoes, his wife was almost silent, absorbed in the imminent crisis wherein it behoved her to be so cautious and so calm.

Presently she made a last effort. "Edward," she said, as imploringly as if she had been the meekest and weakest of women, "do take me with you. I want to go."

But, upborne on his huge wave of self-content, Mr. Scanlan was immovable.

"I have said it, and I won't unsay it. Josephine, your going is perfect nonsense, and you shall not go. I can not allow it."

"But—"

"Am I master in my own house, or not? If not, henceforth I will be. Stop, not another word!"

"Very well," said she, and let him depart without another word. Otherwise, she would have lost all control of herself—have flung desperately at him the secret which she had kept so long—perhaps even have betrayed that other, which, though only two weeks old, seemed to have lasted for years. It was the only thing which restrained her now.

What if any thing should happen—any thing which might harm him—and she had let him go from her in anger, had parted from him in this great crisis without a word or a kiss? Present, her husband sometimes tormented her to an unendurable degree; but absent, the poor heart went back, often self-reproachfully, to its old fealty, and tried to think the best of him that it could.

Sitting at her bedroom window, Josephine listened to the funeral bell tolling across the dreary common. It had rained all day, but there was now a faint clearing up toward the west, giving a hope that the ceremony—which had been put off as late in the day as possible, to allow the poorer parishioners to follow to his grave one who had been to them invariably charitable and kind—might be less gloomy than a wet October funeral always is. She seemed to see it all—to hear the splash of the assembling feet in the muddy church-yard, and the sound of her husband's voice reading impressively and sonorously, "I am the Resurrection and the Life"—words which to her as yet were mere words, no more.

When the bell ceased, Bridget and the younger children, who had stood at the gate listening, came in, and Mrs. Scanlan was summoned to tea. Mechanically she poured it out, hear-

"Man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,"

that his authority must be exercised. When

ing absently the talk around her, which was at first rather subdued: the little people had almost forgotten him, still they knew their mother was fond of Mr. Oldham. But soon they grew quite lively again; they were always so lively when papa was out. And thus time passed, Josephine hardly knew how, till Bridget entered to ask if she should bring in candles.

Then the intolerable suspense became too much for human strength to fight against. Come what would, she must go to the Rectory. Her two eldest boys had returned, having watched the funeral from a distance, and had settled to their evening's employment. The natural thing would have been to say to them, "Children, your papa has not come back; I am going to meet him;" but then she knew her boy César, who had a great idea of protecting his mother, would insist upon accompanying her. So she stole out of the back-door like a thief, avoiding even Bridget, though she fancied Bridget saw her, and flew, rather than walked, in the wind and rain and darkness, across the common and through Ditchley streets. No one was abroad; the day had been one of those funeral holidays which seem like Sunday; the shops were still half-closed, and behind them Mrs.

Scanlan saw little groups sitting, discussing their good old rector, no doubt, and wondering who would be their new one.

Presently she found herself at the Rectory gate—the same gate over which had leaned the shrewd, kind old face when Mr. Oldham had said those momentous words about her being "his heiress." Were they true or not? The fact must be known by this time. And surely, in that case, Mr. Scanlan would have come straight home. Why had he not come home? Had any thing happened? And a forewarning of that daily fear which she must henceforth live in—could tell to no one, could seek help for from no one—struck through her like a bolt of ice.

There was but one road to the Rectory; she could not have missed him; he must be still there. But now she had come she dared not go in. What reason could she give for her coming? How explain, even to the servant that should open the door, why she stood there, drenched with rain, shivering with cold and fear, looking, she was well aware, more like a madwoman than the respectable curate's respectable wife? No—she must wait a little longer. Nothing might have happened—nei-



AT THE RECTORY GATE.

ther good nor bad: Mr. Scanlan might have just staid to hear the will read, and then gone somewhere or other to spend the evening instead of coming home.

There was a large tree which overhung the gate: there Josephine sheltered and hid herself, till the soaking rain dropped through the thin leaves. Years afterward, when she had almost forgotten what it felt like to walk in the cold and wet, when she went clad in silk and furs, and trod daintily from carpeted halls to cushioned carriages, hardly knowing what it was to be unattended or alone, Josephine used to recall, as in a sort of nightmare, that poor creature—scarcely herself at all—who crouched shivering under the tree at the Rectory gate; trembling lest any body should see her, wondering if even God Himself saw her, or whether His eyes had not long been shut upon her and her misery. And the rain beat, and the wind blew—the wild, salt-tasted wind, coming westward from the sea—and, quarter after quarter, the dull clang of Ditchley church-clock rang out from over the rector's newly-closed grave the hours that to him were nothing now—to her, every thing.

It was half past nine at least, and she was wet through and through, yet still felt that she could not go back, and that to go forward was equally impossible, when she heard wheels through the dark, driving slowly from the house to the gate. When the light came, she saw it was Dr. Waters's brougham. He was in it, and some other gentleman, whom he seemed to be supporting.

Josephine sprang to the carriage door, and shook its closed windows with such eager appeal that the doctor turned round angrily:

"Go away, woman! Good God, Mrs. Scanlan! is that you?"

"Yes, it is I. Is not that my husband?"

A feeble voice answered, and a still feebler hand was put out: "Josephine, come in here. I want you."

"Yes, come in at once. Take my place; I will walk home," said Dr. Waters, getting out, and then told her that Mr. Scanlan had had a slight fainting-fit; something had occurred which startled him very much; but he was much better now, and would be well directly.

Josephine looked from one to the other, half-bewildered.

"My dear lady, I had better explain: it was no ill news, quite the contrary; and your husband will soon get over the shock of it. I wish you had been here," he added, a little coldly; "it was a pity, as Mr. Scanlan says, that your feelings did not allow you to be present at the funeral and the reading of the will, as Langhorne particularly desired; and he was the only person who knew about the matter. Mrs. Scanlan, I have to congratulate you. You are Mr. Oldham's heiress."

Josephine bent her head assentingly—that was all.

"It is a very large property; worth a hundred thousand pounds, I should say. Except a few legacies, it is all yours."

"Josephine, do you hear? all ours!" gasped Mr. Scanlan, pressing forward. "A hundred thousand pounds! We are rich—rich for life!"

Again she assented; but, in truth, hardly did hear: she only saw that gray, pinched face, drawn with pain, those shaking hands, which seemed already to clutch eagerly at the imaginary gold.

With gentle force Dr. Waters helped her into the carriage, and was gone. Then she took her husband's head on her shoulder, and his hands in hers; thus they sat, without speaking, as the carriage slowly moved homeward.

It had come at last—this golden dream. As Edward had said, they were rich—rich for life; richer than in her wildest ambition she had ever desired. She could hardly realize it at all. The fortune had come; but what was the worth of it—to her, or hers?

By-and-by her husband roused himself a little. "Who would have thought it, Josephine? I was so startled, it quite knocked me over; however, I am better now, very much better. Soon I shall come all right and enjoy every thing."

"I hope so."

"But you—you speak so oddly! Are you not delighted with our good luck?—or rather yours, for Mr. Oldham has so tied his money up that I can't touch it—I have almost nothing to do with it. He maintained his dislike to me to the last. And to think of his saying not a word about what he had done. Nobody knew but Langhorne, unless—" with a sudden shrill suspicion in his tone, "unless you did?"

In her state of terrible suspense, Mrs. Scanlan had not paused to consider what course she should pursue when the suspense ended, let it end either way; nor had decided whether or not she should tell her husband the whole circumstances, which were so difficult of explanation. Taken by surprise, she stammered—hesitated.

"You did know—I am sure of it."

"Yes," she answered, slowly and humbly, very humbly. "Mr. Oldham told me himself; though I hardly believed it. Still, he did tell me."

"When?"

"Seven years ago."

"Seven years! You have kept this secret from me—your own husband—for seven years! Josephine, I'll never forgive you—never believe in you and more."

And she—what could she say? To ask his pardon would be a mere pretense, for she felt herself not guilty; to explain her motives was useless, since he could never understand them. So this "lucky" husband and wife, whom all Ditchley was now talking over, wondering at or envying their good fortune, turned away from one another, and drove home to Wren's Nest together without exchanging another word.

CHAPTER XIV.

DITCHLEY opened its eyes wide with unfeigned astonishment when it learned that its sometime curate was suddenly transformed into the Reverend Edward Scanlan of Oldham Court, master of a fortune which, even allowing for gossiping exaggerations, was still sufficient to make him a county magnate for the rest of his days. True, his position was in one sense merely nominal, Mr. Oldham having taken the precaution to tie the fortune safely up in the hands of two trustees, Dr. Waters and Mr. Langhorne, so that Mr. Scanlan had little more to do than to receive twice a year his annual income, while the principal was secured to his wife and children. But these arrangements were kept private, especially by himself; and he burst out, full-blown, as the ostensible owner of one of the finest estates and most picturesque mansions in the county.

Oldham Court, one of the few Elizabethan houses now remaining in England, had remained, almost unaltered, both within and without, for generations. Its late possessor had never lived in it—but had carefully preserved it, just as it was—letting the land round it to a gentleman-farmer, and by good management doubling the value of the property. The house itself, with the little church adjoining, wherein slept generations of Oldhams, was far away from town or village: Ditchley, eleven miles off, being its nearest link to civilization. But it sat in the midst of a lovely country, hilly though not bleak, solitary yet not dreary—the sort of region to which any lover of nature is speedily attracted, and loves with a strong adhesiveness that people who live in streets and squares, or in neighborhoods without any salient characteristics, can not in the least understand. And though Mr. Oldham had never resided there—at least never since he had inherited it—from the wording of his last will he had evidently loved it much.

In his will he expressly desired that the Scanlans should immediately remove thither: that, unless upon great emergency, it should neither be sold nor rebuilt, but that Mrs. Scanlan should inhabit it just as it was as long as she lived. That, in short, it should be made into the family home of a new family, which should replace the extinct Oldhams.

To account for his having chosen Mrs. Scanlan as his heiress, various old tales were raked up, and added as excrescences to the obvious truth—such as Mr. Oldham's having been once in love with a Frenchwoman, Mrs. Scanlan's mother, or aunt, or cousin—nobody quite knew which. There might or might not have been a grain of fact at the bottom of these various fictions; but they were never verified; and common-sense people soon took the common-sense view of the subject: namely, that when a man has no heirs he is quite right in choosing for himself what Providence has denied him, and endowing with his fortune the most suit-

able person he can find: who is also the one to whom it will do most good, and who will do most good with it. And these qualifications—every one agreed—were combined in Mrs. Scanlan.

It was a curious fact, showing how in course of years all people find their level—even in the eyes of the outside world—that no surprise was expressed at Ditchley because Mr. Oldham left his fortune to Mrs. Scanlan rather than to her husband; indeed some people sagely remarked “that it was just as well.” This was all; for Mr. Scanlan still retained much of his old popularity; and, besides, many who would have been ready enough to criticise the poor curate at Wren's Nest, looked with lenient eyes on the master of Oldham Court.

The migration was accomplished speedily; Mr. Scanlan himself taking little part therein. He was in feeble health for some weeks after the shock of his good fortune; so that he had to leave to his wife the management of every thing. He left to her, almost without a single inquiry, the management of one thing—which, with terrified haste, she accomplished within the first few days of her new inheritance. She got possession of the school accounts, went over them, found the exact amount of her husband's defalcations, and replaced it out of a sum which she obtained from her trustees for her own immediate use. Then she breathed freely. There had been but a hair's-breadth between her and ruin—that utter ruin which lost honor brings; but the crisis was over, and she had escaped.

He had escaped, that is; but she had ceased to divide, even in thought, her own and her husband's fortunes. The strong line which needs to be drawn between deliberate wickedness and mere weakness—even though they often arrive at the same sad end—she now saw clear. She never for a moment disguised from herself what sort of a man Edward Scanlan was—but as long as she could protect him from himself, and protect her children from him, she did not fear.

It was with a full heart—fuller than any body dreamed of—that she left Wren's Nest and its associations behind forever. The very words “for ever” seemed to hallow them, and make her shrink with pain when Mr. Scanlan declared that he “shook the dust of it from off his feet, and hoped he might never again re-enter that horrid hole.” But she said nothing; and drove by her husband's side, in their own comfortable carriage, across the smiling country, to the old gateway of Oldham Court.

It so chanced she had never seen the place before. Mr. Oldham had sometimes planned to take her there, but the visit had never come about; now, at the very first sight, her heart leaped to it, as to the ideal home for which she had been craving all her days. Gray, quiet, lonely—with its quaint old-fashioned gables, and long low Tudor windows—no palatial residence or baronial hall, but just a house—a house to live in; and to live in contentedly

till one died—Josephine felt with a sudden thrill of ineffable thankfulness that here indeed was her rest; where no storms could come, and out of which no cruel hands would uproot her again. For surely now her husband would be satisfied. She asked him the question.

"Satisfied? Well—yes. A nice house; but rather queer-looking and old-fashioned. What a pity we are obliged to keep it as it is, and can not pull it down and build it up afresh as a modern residence!"

"Do you think so?" was all Mrs. Scanlan replied. She never argued with her husband now.

At the door stood all her children waiting—a godly group; justifying Mr. Oldham's choice of the family which should succeed his own. Behind them was an array of new servants, men and women, with Bridget at their head—Bridget, now promoted to "Mrs. Halloran," and having with true Irish adaptability taken her place at once as confidential servant and follower of the family. A position greatly against her master's liking: indeed he had proposed pensioning her off, and dispatching her at once to Ireland, till he considered that a "follower" implied a "family;" and to be able to speak of "our housekeeper, who has been with us twenty years," gave a certain character of antique respectability to his establishment. Therefore, as he passed her in her black silk dress and neat cap—Bridget was, especially in her latter days, that rare but not impossible anomaly, a tidy Irishwoman—he acknowledged her courtesy with a patronizing "How d'ye do?" and said no more concerning her proposed dismissal.

Theoretically and poetically, the sudden translation from poverty to riches is quite easy, natural, and agreeable; practically it is not so. Let a family be ever so refined and aristocratic, still if it has been brought up in indigence, its habits will have caught some tinge of the untoward circumstances through which it has had to struggle. I once knew a lady who confessed that she found it difficult to learn to order her servant to "bring candles," instead of "the candle;" and no doubt the Scanlan family on its first accession to wealth were exposed to similar perplexities.

The younger branches, especially, found their splendid new shoes rather troublesome wear. Accustomed to the glorious freedom of poverty, they writhed a little under their gilded chains. They quarreled with the new nurses, made fun of the dignified butler and footman, and altogether gave so much trouble that it was a relief when, César having already gone to Oxford, the two other boys were sent off to school, and the three girls alone remained to brighten Oldham Court. But with these, despite all their father's arguments about the propriety of sending them to a fashionable London boarding-school, the mother point-blank refused to part. A governess was procured—the best attainable: and so the domestic chaos was gradually reduced to order.

This done, and when she grew accustomed to see her children in their new position—no longer running wild like village boys and girls, but well-dressed, well-taught, and comporting themselves like a gentleman's sons and daughters—their mother's heart swelled with exultant joy. Her seven years of terrible suspense seemed blotted out; and the future—her children's future, for she had long ceased to have any other—stretched itself out before her clear as a sunshiny landscape. The happiness was worth the pain.

It had only been her own pain—after all. Now, she sometimes smiled, half bitterly, to think what useless pangs had wrung her tender conscience about keeping that secret from her husband. He himself did not seem to feel it in the least. After the first outburst of wounded vanity he had never once referred to the subject; seemed, indeed, to have quite lost sight of it. To do him justice, he was not one to "bear malice," as the phrase is; he forgot his injuries as quickly as he did his blessings. Besides, so many sensitive troubles are avoided, and so many offenses condoned, by people whose law of conduct is—not what is right or wrong, but what is expedient.

Therefore, as soon as he recovered full health, which he did to all appearance ere long, Mr. Scanlan began to enjoy his changed fortunes amazingly; accepting them not so much as a gift, but a debt long owed to him by a tardy Providence. Within a few months—nay, weeks—he had ignored his Ditchley life as completely as the butterfly does his chrysalis exuviae, and burst out full-winged as the master of Oldham Court. He talked about "my place" as if he had possessed it all his days; only grumbling sometimes at the house itself—its dullness, its distance from any town, and, above all, its old-fashionedness. Edward Scanlan, who had been brought up in that phase of modern luxury in which the cost of a thing constitutes its sole value, did not approve of the Gothic style at all.

But to his wife, from the first minute she crossed its threshold, Oldham Court felt like home—her home till death, and that of her descendants after her. For she had come to that time of life when we begin involuntarily to look forward to our own secession in favor of the young, coming lives, who will carry on into futurity this dream of our life—which already begins to seem to us "like a shadow that departeth"—and backward on those past generations to whom we shall ere long descend. Thus, even while thinking of her children and children's children who would inherit this place, Josephine, wandering about it, often saw it peopled with innumerable gentle ghosts, into whose empty seats her bright, living, young flock had climbed. She felt a great tenderness over these long-dead Oldhams; and took pains to identify and preserve the family portraits which still hung in hall and staircase. In her idle hours, only too numerous now, she liked to

go and sit in the little church, which was so close to the house that, much to her husband's horror, one of the dining-room windows looked on to the church-yard. He had it boarded up immediately; but still, from her bedroom casement, Josephine would, of moonlight nights, or in early sunrises, gaze upon that tiny God's acre, and think, almost with a sense of pleasure, that she should one day be buried there.

These vanished Oldhams, they slept in peace—from the cross-legged Crusader with his hound at his feet, to the two medieval spouses, kneeling, headless, side by side, and behind each a long train of offspring; and then on through many generations to the last one—Mr. Oldham's father, over whom a very ugly angel, leaning on a draped arm, kept watch and ward. Mrs. Scanlan often amused herself with making out the inscriptions, old English or Latin—she had taught herself Latin to teach her boys. These epitaphs were touching memorials of a family which, though not exactly noble, had been evidently honorable and honored to the last. Necessarily so, or it could not have kept itself so long afloat on the deep sea of oblivion; for it is astonishing how quickly a race which has in it the elements of degradation and decay can dwindle down from nobility to obscurity.

As she pondered over these relics of an extinct but not degenerate race, Josephine felt stirring strangely in her the blood of the old De Bougainvilles. The desire to found, or to revive, a family; to live again after death in our unknown descendants; to plan for them, toil for them, and bequeath to them the fruit of our toils—a passion for which many men have sacrificed so much—came into this woman's heart with a force such as few men could understand, because thereto was added the instinct of motherhood. Her ambition—for, as I have said, she was ambitious—quenched inevitably as regarded the present, passed on to the days when, she and their father sleeping in peace together, her children should succeed to those possessions which she herself could never fully enjoy. Especially she used to dream of the time when César, reigning in her stead, should be master of Oldham Court.

"Yes," she thought, "my son"—she usually called her eldest boy "my son"—"must marry early: he will be able to afford it. And he must choose some girl after my own heart, to whom I will be such a good mother-in-law. And oh! how proud I shall be of the third generation!"

Thus planned she—thus dreamed she: looking far into the future, with stone-blind eyes, as we all of us look. Still, I think it made her happy—happier than she had been for many years.

One little cloud, however, soon rose on her bright horizon: strangely bright now, for in the sudden novelty of things, in the great relief and ease of his present lot, and in his power of getting every luxury he wished for, even Mr. Scanlan seemed to have taken a new turn, and

to give his wife no trouble whatever. He was actually contented! He ceased to find fault with any thing, became amenable to reason, and absolutely affectionate. His good angel—who, I suppose, never quite deserts any man—stood behind him, shaking ambrosial odors over him, and consequently over the whole family, for at least three months after their change of fortune.

And then the little cloud arose. The three Misses Scanlan, now requiring to be educated up to the level of the county families, among whose young ladies they would have to take their place, were put under a first-rate governess, who had, necessarily, a rather forcing system. It worked well with Gabrielle and Catherine—clever, handsome, healthy creatures, who learned wholesomely and fast—but with Adrienne, now nearly old enough to enter society, the case was altogether different.

Alas, poor Adrienne! she would never be a show daughter to introduce into the world. She was neither a bright girl nor a pretty girl; nay, her appearance was almost worse than insignificant, for her poor weak spine had grown a little awry, and stooping over her studies made it much worse. Already she required to have her figure padded and disguised in various ingenious ways, which took all her mother's French skill to devise; and already her gentle pale face had that sad look peculiar to deformed people.

Of that she herself was painfully conscious. Beside her mother's stately dignity, and her sister Gabrielle's reed-like grace, she knew well how ill she looked, and this made her shy and shrinking from society. Other things, which she was only too quick to find out, added to this feeling.

"I can't imagine why you are always wanting Adrienne in the drawing-room," her father would say, not always out of the girl's hearing. "She does not care to come, and really she is not very ornamental. Keep her in the shade—by all means keep her in the shade."

And into the shade Adrienne instinctively retired, even from the first day she set foot in Oldham Court, especially when there happened to be visitors—a circumstance that occurred seldom enough—which much surprised and displeased Mr. Scanlan.

"Of course every body will call upon us—all the county families, I mean," he kept saying; and impressed upon his wife that at certain hours every day she was to sit prepared for their reception. Indeed, he was always laying down the law of etiquette for her in minute things, and telling her that she did not properly recognize her position. "For, my dear, you have been so long out of the world—if, indeed, you were ever fairly in it—that you can not be expected to understand the ways of society as I do."

"Possibly not," she would answer, half amused, yet with a lurking sarcasm in her smile. But she obeyed, for it really was not

worth her while to disobey. She never cared to quarrel over small things.

Visitors came: only, alas! they were principally Ditchley people, driving over in hired flys and pony-chaises; not a single carriage and pair had as yet passed under the Gothic gateway. Nevertheless, Mrs. Scanlan welcomed her guests with all sorts of kindly attentions.

"Why should I not?" said she, when her husband remonstrated; "they were friendly to me when I was poor. Besides, they are all worthy people, and I like them."

"Which are not sufficient reasons for cultivating them, and I desire that they may not be cultivated any more than you can help," said Mr. Scanlan, with the slightly dictatorial tone which he sometimes used now.

Josephine flushed up, but made no answer. Indeed, she rarely did make answers now to things of which she disapproved. It was astonishing how little of actual conversation—the rational, pleasant, and improving talk which even husbands and wives can sometimes find time to indulge in, and which makes the quietest life a continual entertainment—passed between this husband and wife, who had been married so many years.

Just when his eager expectation of visitors—suitable visitors—had changed into angry surprise that they never came, Mr. Scanlan entered the house one day in eager excitement. He had met on the road the two young sons of his nearest neighbor, the Earl of Turberville, coming to call, they said, and ask permission to shoot over his preserves.

"I should have invited them to lunch, but I feared you would not have it nice enough; however, they have promised to come to-morrow—both Lord Cosmo and Lord Charles. So be sure, Josephine, that you have every thing in apple-pie order, and dress yourself elegantly" (he still, when excited, pronounced it "elegantly"). "For who knows but the Earl and Countess themselves might come. Lord Cosmo said he knew his father had something very particular to say to me."

And for the next twenty-four hours poor Mr. Scanlan was in a perpetual fidget, worrying his butler and footman, till they civilly hinted that they had always lived in high families, and knew their own business; and especially worrying his wife, who did not participate in this idolatrous worship of rank and title, which had always been a strong characteristic of the Irish curate. Long before luncheon time he insisted upon her taking her seat in the drawing-room: dressed—with elegance, certainly—though with not half the splendor he desired.

"Ah!" said he, sighing; "you may take a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink. I fear, Josephine, I shall never succeed in raising you to the level of your present position. I give you up!"

The hour arrived, but not the guests; and, after waiting till three o'clock, Mrs. Scanlan

insisted on going in to luncheon. She had scarcely taken her place there when the two lads entered—rather roughly-clad and roughly-behaved lads, any thing but young lords, apparently, until they caught sight of the lady at the head of the table. Then their instinctive good-breeding told them that they had been guilty of a courtesy and a mistake. They were full of apologies, Lord Cosmo especially, for being so unwarrantably late; but they gave no reason for their tardiness, and neither made a single excuse for the non-appearance of the Earl and Countess—indeed, seemed not to have an idea that these latter were expected. Nor did Josephine refer to the fact, being long accustomed to her husband's great powers of imagination.

She rather liked the youths, who were fresh from Eton—pleasant, gentlemanly fellows, and conversation soon became easy and general. Lord Cosmo tried in various quiet ways to find out who Mrs. Scanlan was, and how she came to inherit Oldham Court. At last he put the question whether she was not distantly related to Mr. Oldham; and when his curiosity gained only a brief No, he covered his confusion by darting into a long explanation of how the Oldhams and Turbervilles were the two most ancient families in the county, and had gone on quarreling, intermarrying, and quarreling again, ever since William the Conqueror.

"They were Saxons and we Normans, so we could not help fighting, you know."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Scanlan, and turned the conversation by some unimportant remark; but Mr. Scanlan brought it back eagerly.

"My wife also is of Norman descent. She comes of the Vicomtes de Bougainville—a very old and honorable family."

"Oh!" replied the young man; and added, with a slight bow, "Cela va sans dire."

"What was that your lordship said?" inquired the host, eagerly; but the hostess, with a hot cheek—alas! her cheeks burned very often during that afternoon—stopped the answer by inquiring if Lord Cosmo had ever been in France, and so leading the talk widely astray from herself and her ancestors.

Calm as she sat—looking, in her fine Gothic dining-hall, like a medieval picture—she sat, nevertheless, upon thorns the whole time; for it was the first time for many years that she had seen her husband as he appeared in general society, and the sight was not agreeable. The court suit of prosperity is only becoming to courtly figures. Many a man, decent enough in common broadcloth, when dressed up in velvet and point lace, looks painfully like a footman. Corporeally—or I should say sartorially—fate had denied Mr. Scanlan the pleasure of wearing bright colors—"Once a clergyman, always a clergyman" being, unfortunately, English law. But in his manners he assumed a costume of startling vividness and variety. "All things to all men," was his maxim, and he car-

ried it out with great unction; appearing by turns as the gentleman of fashion, of wealth, and of family; never knowing exactly which character to assume, for all were equally assumptions, and equally unfamiliar. The simple plan of avoiding all difficulties, by being always one's own honest self, did not occur to this ingenious Irishman.

He could not help it—it was his nature. But it was none the less painful to those belonging to him. People tell of the penitential horse-hair which lovely women have worn under their velvet and minever, cambric and lawn. I think I could tell of one woman who knew what it was to wear it too.

When the guests and Mr. Scanlan had quitted the drawing-room, Adrienne crept in there, and her mother, who was standing at the window watching the shadows come and go over the hill-sides, wistfully—as we look at a view that we hope to watch unchanged until we die—felt her daughter take her hand. She turned round immediately.

"My little girl!" stroking her hair—Adrienne had very pretty hair; Bridget often used to speak of it with sad pride—"My little girl, I wonder if you will ever be married! I almost hope not." Then she added, quickly, "Because I should miss you so; and, besides, women can live quite happily without ever being married."

"I know they can; above all when they have got such a dear mother to live for as mine," said Adrienne, tenderly, but turning rosy-red as she spoke; so that Mrs. Scanlan, a little surprised at the child's sensitiveness, changed the conversation immediately. She even repented having alluded to a subject upon which Adrienne could as yet only have theorized. Though she was nearly seventeen, she was still very childish; and she had scarcely spoken to a young man in her life—except Mr. Summerhayes, who, compared with her, was not a young man at all.

This Mr. Summerhayes, the great bugbear of Josephine's married life, had apparently quite disappeared from her horizon. Among the congratulatory letters which had reached them of late was one from him, but Mr. Scanlan had read it and put it in the fire, and "wondered how the fellow could presume," so no more was said upon the matter. She learned accidentally that the artist was living from hand to mouth at Rome, or some other Italian city, so she had no fear that, in their present circumstances, he would be any longer a snare to her husband. Nay, she felt a little sorry for him, scamp as he was, remembering all his amusing ways at Wren's Nest, when they were as poor as he was now. In the almost preternatural calm which brooded over her life now—at least, her external life—she could afford to be pitiful even to a poor scoundrel.

Mr. Scanlan came back in the highest spirits, having seen his guests away on their horses, and exhibited his own, which were far finer animals.

"And they owned it, too, both Lord Cosmo and Lord Charles, and wished they had as good; but the Earl is as poor as a rat, every body knows. Exceedingly nice young fellows their lordships are! and I hope we shall see a great deal of them. You must be sure to be at home, Josephine, when the Countess calls. These are the sort of friends that we ought to make. Not your horrid, commonplace, Ditchley people; who were well enough once, but don't suit us now, and will suit us less and less, I prophesy. Ha—ha—my dear, you don't know what I know. How should you like me to get a handle to my name? What do you say to being called 'My lady'?"

He took his wife round the waist and kissed her with considerable excitement.

"Edward," she answered, in her quietest and gentlest tone, "sit down here and tell me what you mean."

With difficulty, and at first entire incredulity, she got out of him something which, though it seemed to her too ridiculous seriously to believe, was yet a possibility; and a note, or memorandum, which her husband showed her, which at the last minute had been given him by Lord Cosmo, confirmed it as a possibility. Lord Turberville, though very poor, was a keen politician, and deeply in the confidence of the government, to whom, as well as to himself, it was necessary to secure the influence of the large landowners of the county. Among these, almost the largest was the owner of the Oldham Court estates. His lordship had, therefore, concocted a scheme for selecting Mr. Scanlan as the most suitable person to go up to London, as head of a deputation to present an address on a certain expected Royal event—I am intentionally obscure as to what that event was—the presenters of which address generally received the honor of knighthood. It was a "job," of course; but not worse than hundreds of political jobs which are perpetrated every day in our free and independent country; and Mr. Scanlan was delighted with the idea, nor in the least astonished that such a tribute should be paid to his own exceeding merit.

"And what shall I answer the Earl?" said he, when he had expended his raptures on the advantages in store for him.

"Have you answered?" his wife asked, with a keen look.

"Well—to tell the truth—as I never imagined you would be so foolish as to object to the thing, I sent word to Lord Turberville—"

"Yes, yes—I understand. You have answered. Then why go through the form of consulting me on the subject?"

It was one of his small shams, his petty cowardlinesses, which so irritated this woman, who would any day rather have been struck on the cheek openly, than secretly stung to the heart. But it had to be borne, and it was borne. As to the thing itself—the question as to whether or not she should be called "my lady"—she did not, in truth, care two straws about it. I think

she would have been proud, exceedingly proud, had her husband earned a title in some noble way; but in this way—for she saw through the mysteries of the matter at once—it affected her in no possible degree.

"Do as you like," she said. "It is much the same to me whether I am Mrs. or Lady Scanlan."

"Scanlan! ah, that is the nuisance! Ours is such a horrid common name. If Mr. Oldham had only given us his own—Lord Cosmo expressed surprise that he did not. Don't you think, Josephine, we could assume it?"

Josephine regarded her husband with unfeigned astonishment. "No; certainly not. If he had wished it, he would certainly have said so. Besides, to give up your own name—your father's name—"

"Oh—but the old man is dead; he'll never know it. And what did well enough for my father is different for me. I have risen in the world; and who cares for my antecedents? Indeed, the less we speak of them the better."

"Do you think so?" said Josephine once more. And there flashed upon her the remembrance of the kind old woman—certainly not a lady, but a true, kind woman, whose grandmotherly arms had received her own first-born babe; and of the old man, who, common and vulgar as he was, had yet a heart, for it had broken with grief at having reduced to poverty his wife and only son. These two in their lifetime Josephine had not loved much; had only put up with them for the sake of her Edward; but she recalled them affectionately now. And even for herself, the years she had borne the name, through weal and woe—alas! more woe than weal—seemed to consecrate it in her eyes. "No," she continued, after a pause, "do not let us change our name: I could never fancy myself any thing but Mrs. Scanlan."

"Josephine! how can you be so stupid?" said her husband, irritably. "I hope I am at least as wise as you, and this seems to me an excellent scheme. In fact," he added, folding his hands and casting up his eyes—those effective black eyes which did no pulpit-duty now—"I think that to let it go would be to fail in my gratitude to Providence, and lose an opportunity of distinguishing myself in that sphere of life to which, as our noble catechism says, it has pleased God to call me. For I am comparatively a young man still; much under fifty, you know, and I may live to seventy, as my father did. And your father, was he not seventy-four or seventy-five? By-the-by"—and he started up, struck with an idea so sudden and brilliant that he could not keep it to himself one moment. "Since you so strongly object to our taking this name of Oldham, what say you, my darling wife, to our taking one that actually does belong to us—at least to you? Suppose we were to call ourselves by your maiden name, De Bougainville?"

Josephine turned pale as death. All the blood in her heart seemed to stand still a moment, and then rush on in a frantic tide. She

tried to speak, but her throat contracted with a sort of spasm.

"Wait. It is so sudden. Let me think." And she sat down, a little apart, with her hand over her eyes. These never sought her husband's; they never did now, either for help, counsel, or sympathy; she knew it would be only vain, seeking for what one can not hope to find. All she did was to sit in silence, listening, as to the noise of a stream of water, to the flow of his voluminous talk. It harmed her not; she scarcely heard it.

But Mr. Scanlan's sudden suggestion had as suddenly and powerfully affected her. There was in Josephine a something—hitherto conscientiously and sternly suppressed—which her husband never dreamed of; the strong "aristocratic" feeling. Not in his sense—the cringing worship of a mere title—but the prejudice in favor of whatever is highest and best, in birth, breeding, and manner of life. Though she never spoke of it, her pride in these things, so far as she herself possessed them, was extreme. The last of the De Bougainvilles cherished her name and family with a tenderness all the fonder because it was like love for the dead; the glory of the race had departed. To revive it—to transmit to her children, and through them to distant descendants, not merely the blood, but the name, was a pleasure so keen that it thrilled her almost like pain.

"Well, Josephine? Bless me—how you start! You quite frightened me. Well; and what do you say, my dear?"

"Don't tempt me!" she answered, with a half-hysterical laugh. "As Bridget says, 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' If once I begin thinking of such a thing—of seeing my boy César another César de Bougainville—there were six generations of them, all named César, and all honest, honorable men; my father was the last. Ah, mon Dieu! mon père—mon père!" She burst into tears.

Mr. Scanlan was a little discomposed, almost displeased; but, not being a sensitive man, or quick to divine motives, he set down his wife's extraordinary emotion to the excitement of possibly becoming "my lady," to say nothing of "Lady de Bougainville," which was such a charmingly "genteel" name. He patted her on the back, and bade her "take things easily, she would get used to them in time;" and then, as he especially disliked any thing like a scene, he called Adrienne to attend to her mother, and took himself off immediately.

And his wife?

She had no one to speak to, no one to take counsel of. Unless her little daughter, who, sitting at the further end of the room—whither Adrienne usually crept when her father appeared—had heard all, might be called a counselor. The girl, so simple in some things, was in others much wiser than her years—eldest daughters of sorely-tried women often are. Adrienne, being called, said a few wise words which influenced her mother more than at the



MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

time either were aware. And she told a few things which her brothers had in confidence told to her—how Louis and Martin, in their grand school “for noblemen and gentlemen,” were taunted perpetually about the “Scanlan and Co.” porter-bottles; and even César, fine young fellow as he was, found that, until he had established his character as a reading man, so that nobody asked who his father was, all his wealth failed to be a sufficient passport into the best Oxford society. In short, the family were suffering under the inevitable difficulties of *nouveaux riches*, which of course they would live down in time—but still it would take time. To shorten this—especially for the boys, who were of an age to feel such difficulties acutely—would be advisable if possible. And it was possible that things might be easier for the three lads, just entering the world, if they entered it as the sons of Sir Edward and Lady de Bougainville.

Weak reasoning, perhaps! It would have been stronger and braver to hold fast to the paternal name, ennobling and beautifying it by such tender fidelity. And so doubtless would have been done, by both wife and children, had the father been a different sort of father. But—as I have oftentimes repeated—life is not unlevel, and in it people usually get what they earn. In this family, as in most others, things were—as they were, and nothing could make them otherwise.

When the mother and daughter went down stairs to dinner the matter was quite decided.

“Papa,” said Adrienne, mustering up a strange courage, for she saw her mother was hardly able to speak, and going straight up to her father as he stood on the hearth-rug with a slightly ill-used and dignified air. “Papa, mamma has told me every thing, and I am so glad. I hope all will come about as you wish. How nice it will be to hear you called ‘Sir Edward!’ And just look at mamma in that new dress of hers; she put it on to-night to please you. Will she not make a beautiful Lady de Bougainville?”

CHAPTER XV.

It was all settled at last, though after much delay, and very considerable expense. One fine morning the *Times* newspaper announced, in advertisement, to all the world that “the Reverend Edward Scanlan, of Oldham Court, meant thenceforward, in memory of his wife’s father, the late Vicomte de Bougainville” (he inserted this paragraph himself, and Josephine first saw it in print when remonstrance was idle), “to assume, instead of his own, the name and arms of De Bougainville.” These last he had already obtained with much trouble and cost, and affixed them upon every available article within and without the house, from letter-paper and carriage-panels down to dinner-plates and hall chairs. His wife did not interfere: these were, after all, only outside things.

But when she saw, for the first time, her new-old name on the address of a letter, and had to sign once again, after this long interval of years, "Josephine de Bougainville," the same sudden constriction of heart seized her. It seemed as if her youth were returned again, but in a strange, ghostly fashion, and with one vital difference between the old days and the new; then her future lay all in herself, all in this visible world; now, did she, who had long ceased to think of herself and her own personal happiness, ever look forward to the world invisible?

I have said Josephine was not exactly a religious woman. The circumstances of her married life had not been likely to make her such. But we can not, at least some people can not, live wholly without God in the world. Sometimes, in her long leisure hours among these old tombs, or still oftener in the lovely country around Oldham Court, where she wandered at her will, feeling thankful that her lines had fallen in pleasant places, the longing for God, the seeking after Him, though in a blind, heathen sort of way, came into her heart and made it calmer and less desolate. Pure it always was, and the love of her children kept it warm. But still it needed the great plow-share of affliction—solemn, sacred affliction, coming direct from God, not man—to go over it, so as to make the ground fit for late harvest, all the richer and lovelier because it was so late. As yet, under that composed manner of hers, sedulously as she did her duties, complaining of nothing, and enjoying every thing as much as she could, for it seemed to her absolutely a duty to enjoy, she was nevertheless conscious of the perpetual feeling of "a stone in her heart." Not a fire, as once used to be, an ever-smouldering sense of hot indignation, apprehension, or wrong, but a stone—a cold dead weight that never went away.

Dr. Waters had given her two permanent private advices respecting her husband: to keep him from all agitation, and never to let him be alone for many hours at a time. To carry out this without his discovering it, or the necessity for it, was the principal business of her life, and a difficult task too, requiring all her patience and all her ingenuity. Mr. Scanlan—I beg his pardon, Mr. de Bougainville—was exceedingly well now; and, with care, might remain so for many years. Still the solemn cloud hung over him, which he saw not, and never must be allowed to see, or his weak nature would have succumbed at once. But to his wife it was visible perpetually; leveling alike all her pleasures and all her pains; teaching her unlimited forbearance with him, and yet a power of opposing him, when his own good required it, which was almost remorseless in its strength. As the wifely love departed, the motherly pity, as of a woman over a sick or foolish child, which she has to guard with restrictions that almost look like cruelty, and yet are its only safety, rose up in

that poor, seared heart, which sometimes she could hardly believe was the heart of the girl Josephine de Bougainville. It would have broken long ago, only it was a strong heart, and it was that of the mother of six children.

She was sitting one day in the oriel window of the drawing-room, writing to her boys at school, when her husband rushed in and kissed her in one of his bursts of demonstrative affection.

"Give you joy, give you joy, my lady. You'll be my lady this time next week. I have just heard from Lord Turberville. The address is quite settled at last, and the députation, with myself at its head, starts to-morrow for London."

"To-morrow! That is soon, but I dare say I can manage to get ready," said Mrs. de Bougainville, with a smile.

"You!" her husband replied, and his countenance fell at once; "my dear Josephine, there is not the slightest necessity for *your* going."

"But I should like to go. I want to be with you; it is surely not an unnatural wish;" and then she stopped, with a horrid consciousness of hypocrisy. For she knew in her heart she would much rather have been left at home with her children. But with Dr. Waters's warning ringing in her ears, there was no alternative. She must go with her husband; and once more she said this.

Mr. de Bougainville looked extremely disconcerted, but the wholesome awe he had of his wife, and his real affection for her, though it was little deeper than that of the tame animal which licks the hand that feeds it and makes it physically comfortable, kept his arrogance within bounds.

"I am sure, my dear Josephine, nothing is more natural than for you to wish to be with me, and I should be very glad of your company. But you dislike London life so much, and I shall have a great deal to do and much high society to mix in, and you do not like high society. Really you had better stay at home."

"I can not stay at home," she said, and putting aside all wounded feeling she looked up in his face, which happened to be particularly sickly that day, and saw only the creature she had charge of, whose whole well-being, moral and physical, depended upon her care. It was a total and melancholy reversal of the natural order of things between husband and wife; but Providence had made it so, and how could she gainsay it? She had only to bear it.

"Edward," she entreated—it was actual entreaty, so sharp was her necessity—"take me with you. I will be no burden to you, and I do so want to go."

He made no resistance, it was too much trouble; but saying, with a vexed air, "Well, do as you like, you always do," quitted the room at once.

Doing as she liked! I wonder how many years it was since Josephine enjoyed that en-

viable privilege or luxury, if indeed to any human being it long continues to be either. As her husband slammed the door, she sighed—one long, pent-up, forlorn, passionate sigh: then rose, and set about her preparations for departure.

She left her eldest daughter a delighted queen-regent at Oldham Court, with Bridget as prime minister, promising to be home again as soon as she could. "And remember you'll come back 'my lady,'" whispered Bridget, who of course knew every thing. She had a dim impression that this and all other worldly advantages had accrued solely through the merits of her beloved mistress: and was proud of them accordingly.

Her mistress made no answer. Possibly she thought that to be the wife of some honest, poor man, who earned his bread by the labor of his brains or the sweat of his brow—earned it hardly, but cheerfully; denied himself, but took tender, protecting care of his wife and children; told the truth, paid his debts, and kept his honor unblemished in the face of God and man—was at least as happy a lot as that of Lady de Bougainville.

The husband and wife started on their journey: actually their first journey together since their honey-moon! Traveling *en prince*, with valet and maid and a goodly array of luggage, which greatly delighted Mr. de Bougainville. Especially when they had to pass through Ditchley, where he had never been since they left the place, nor had she. She wanted to stop at Priscilla Nunn's, but found the shop closed, the good woman having given up business and gone abroad.

"A good thing too, and then people will forget her; and forget that you ever demeaned yourself by being a common seamstress. I wonder, Josephine, you were ever so silly as to do such a thing."

"Do you?" said she, remembering something else which he little suspected she had been on the very brink of doing, which she was now thankful she had not done; that almost by miracle Providence had stood in her way and hindered her. Now, sweeping along in her carriage and pair, she recalled that forlorn, desperate woman who had hurried through the dark streets one rainy night to Priscilla Nunn's shop-door, bent on a purpose which she could not even now conscientiously say was a sinful purpose, though Heaven had saved her from completing it. As she looked down on the face by her side, which no prosperity could ever change into either a healthy or a happy face, Josephine said to herself for the twentieth time, "Yes; I am glad I did not forsake him. I never will forsake him—my poor husband!"

Not my dear, my honored—only my "poor" husband. But to such a woman this was enough.

Their journey might have been bright as the May morning itself, but there was always some crumpled rose-leaf in the daily couch of Mr.

de Bougainville. This time it was the non-appearance of the Earl and Countess of Turberville, with whom he said he had arranged to travel. True, he had never seen either of them, nor had his wife; the inhabitants of Turberville Hall and Oldham Court having merely exchanged calls, both missing one another, and there the acquaintance ended. Apparently, Mr. de Bougainville asserted, his lordship's delicacy prevented his coming too prominently forward in this affair at present, but when once the knighthood was bestowed it would be all right. And he was sure, from something Lord Cosmo said, that the Earl wished to travel with him to London, starting from this station.

So he went about seeking him, or somebody like what he supposed an earl to be, but in vain; and at last had to drop suddenly into a carriage where were only a little old lady and gentleman, to whom, at first sight, he took a strong antipathy, as he often did to plain or shabbily-dressed persons. This couple having none of the shows of wealth about them, must, he thought, be quite common people; and he treated them accordingly.

It is a bad thing to fall in love at first sight with your fellow-passengers—in railway carriages or elsewhere; but to hate them at first sight is sometimes equally dangerous. Josephine tried vainly to soften matters, for she had always a tender side to elderly people, and this couple seemed very inoffensive, nay, rather pleasant people, the old lady having a shrewd, kind face, and the old gentleman very courteous manners. But Mr. de Bougainville was barely civil to them: and even made *sotto voce* remarks concerning them for a great part of the journey. Till, reaching the London terminus, he was utterly confounded by seeing the guard of the train—a Ditchley man—rush up to the carriage door with an officious "Let me help you, my lord," and a few minutes after, picking up a book the old lady had left behind her, he read on it the name of the Countess of Turberville.

Poor Mr. de Bougainville! Like one of those short-sighted mortals who walk with angels unawares, he had been traveling for the last three hours with the very persons whose acquaintance he most wished to cultivate, and had behaved himself in such a manner as, it was plain to be seen, would not induce them to reciprocate this feeling. No wonder the catastrophe quite upset him.

"If I had had the least idea who they were!—and it was very stupid of you, Josephine, not to find out; you were talking to her ladyship for ever so long. If I had only known it was his lordship, I would have introduced myself at once. At any rate, I should have treated him quite differently. How very unfortunate!"

"Very," said Mrs. de Bougainville, dryly.

She said no more, for she was much tired, and the noise of the London streets confused her. They had taken a suit of apartments in one of the most public and fashionable "fami-

ly" hotels—it had a homeless, dreary splendor, and she disliked it much. But her husband considered no other abode suitable for Sir Edward and Lady de Bougainville; which personages, in a few days, they became, and received the congratulations, not too disinterested, of all the hotel servants, and even of the master himself, who had learned the circumstance, together with almost fabulous reports of the wealth of Sir Edward in his own county.

Nevertheless, even the most important provincial magnate is a very small person in London. Beyond the deputation which accompanied him, Sir Edward had no visitors at all. He knew nobody, and nobody knew him; that is, nobody of any consequence. One or two of the Summerhayes set hunted him out, but he turned a cold shoulder to them; they were not reputable acquaintances now. And as for his other circle of ancient allies, though it was the season of the May meetings, and he might easily have found them out, he was so terribly afraid of reviving any memories of the poor Irish curate, and of identifying himself again with the party to which he had formerly belonged, that he got out of their way as much as possible. *Honores mutant mores*, it is said; they certainly change opinions. That very peculiarity of the Low Church—at least of its best and sincerest members—which makes them take up and associate with any one, rich or poor, patrician or plebeian, who shares their opinions—this noble characteristic, which has resulted in so much practical good, and earned for them worthily their name of Evangelicals, was, in his changed circumstances, the very last thing palatable to the Reverend Sir Edward de Bougainville.

So he ignored them all, and the "Reverend" too, as much as he could; and turned his whole aspirations to politics and the Earl of Turberville—to whom, haunting as he did the lobby of the House of Commons, he was at last introduced, and from whom he obtained various slight condescensions, of which he boasted much.

But the Countess never called; and day by day the hope of the De Bougainvilles being introduced into high society through her means melted into thin air. Long, weary mornings in the hotel drawing-room, thrown entirely upon each other, as they had not been for years; dull afternoon drives side by side round Hyde Park; dinner spun out to the utmost limit of possible time, and then perhaps a theatre or opera—for Sir Edward had no objection to such mundane dissipations now—these made up the round of the days. But still he refused to leave London, or "bury himself," as he expressed it, at Oldham Court, and thought it very hard that his wife should expect it. One of the painful things to her in this London visit was the indifference her husband showed to her society, and his eagerness to escape from it; which fact is not difficult to understand. I, who knew her only in her old age, can guess well enough how

the small soul must have been encumbered, shamed, and oppressed even to irritation by the greater one. Many a woman has been blamed for being "too good" for a bad husband—too pure, too sternly righteous; but I for one am inclined to think these allegations come from the meaner half of the world. Lady de Bougainville had a very high standard of moral right, an intense pity for those who fell from it, but an utter contempt for those who pretended to it without practicing it. And to such she was probably as obnoxious as Abdiel to Lucifer. And so she became shortly to a set of people who, failing better society, gathered round her husband, cultivating him in coffee-rooms and theatres: new friends, new flatterers, and those "old acquaintance" who always revive, like frozen snakes, in the summer of prosperity, and begin winding about the unfortunate man of property with that oily affection which cynics have well termed "the gratitude for favors about to be received." These Lady de Bougainville saw through at once; they felt that she did, and hated her accordingly. But have we not sacred warrant for the consolation that it is sometimes rather a good thing to be hated—by some people?

Longing, nay, thirsting for home, Josephine implored her husband to take her back thither; and he consented, not for this reason, but because their weekly expenses were so large as to frighten him; for it was a curious thing, and yet not contrary to human nature, that as he grew rich he grew miserly. The money which, when he had it not, he would have spent like water, now, when he had it, he often grudged, especially in small expenditures and in outlays for the sake of other people. His "stingy" wife was, strange to say, now becoming much more extravagant than he.

"Yes, we'll go home, or I shall be ruined. People are all rogues and thieves, and the richer they believe a man to be the more they plunder him." And he would have departed the very next day but for an unexpected hindrance.

Lady Turberville actually called! that is, they found her card lying on the table, and with it an invitation to a large assembly which she was in the habit of giving once in the season; thereby paying off her own social and her husband's political debts. It was a fortnight distant, and Josephine would fain have declined, but her husband looked horrified.

"Refuse! Refuse the Countess! What can you be thinking of? Why, hers is just the set in which we ought to move, where I am sure to be properly appreciated. You too, my dear, when people find out that you come of good family—if you would only get over your country ways, and learn to shine in society."

Josephine smiled, and there came again to her lips the bitter warning, which she knew was safe not to be comprehended, "Let sleeping dogs lie!" For lately, thrust against her will into this busy, brilliant, strong, intellectual life—such as every body must see more or less in

London—there had arisen in her a dim, dormant sense of what she was—a woman with eyes to see, brains to judge, and a heart to comprehend it. Also, what she might have been, and how much she might have done, both of herself and by means of her large fortune, if she had been unmarried, or married to a different sort of man. She felt dawning sometimes a wild, womanly ambition, or rather the foreshadowing of what, under other circumstances, that ambition might have been—as passionate, as tender, as that which she thought she perceived one night in the eyes of a great statesman's wife listening to her husband speaking in the House of Commons. Even as she, Josephine de Bougainville, could have listened, she knew, had Heaven sent her such a man.

But these were wild, wicked thoughts. She pressed them down, and turned her attention to other things, especially to the new fashionable costume in which her husband insisted she was to commence “shining in society.”

When, on the momentous night, Sir Edward handed his wife, rather ostentatiously, through the knot of idlers in the hotel lobby, he declared with truth that she looked “beautiful.” So she did, with the beauty which is independent of mere youth. She had made the best of her beauty, too, as, when nigh upon forty, every woman is bound to take extra pains in doing. In defiance of the court milliner, she had insisted upon veiling her faded neck and arms with rich lace, and giving stateliness to her tall thin figure by sweeping folds of black velvet. Also, instead of foolish artificial flowers in her gray hair, she wore a sort of head-dress, simple yet regal, which made her look, as her maid declared, “like a picture.” She did not try to be young; but she could not help being beautiful.

Enchanted with her appearance, her husband called her exuberantly “his jewel;” which no doubt she was; only he had no wish, like the tender Scotch lover, to “wear her in his bosom”—he would much have preferred to plant her in his cap-front, in a gorgeous setting, for all the world to gaze at. Her value to him was not in herself, but what she appeared to other people.

Therefore, when he saw her contrasted with the brilliant crowd which straggled up the staircase of Turberville House, his enthusiastic admiration of her a little cooled down.

“How dark you look in that black gown! There's something not right about you, not like these other ladies. I see what it is; you dress yourself in far too old-fashioned and too plain a way. Very provoking! when I wanted you to appear your best before her ladyship.”

“She will never see me in this crowd,” was all Josephine answered, or had time to answer, being drifted apart from her husband, who darted after a face he thought he knew.

In the pause, while, half amused, half bewildered, she looked on at this her first specimen of what Sir Edward called “society,” Lady

de Bougainville heard accidentally a few comments on Sir Edward from two young men, who apparently recognized him, but, naturally, not her.

“That man is a fool—a perfect fool. And such a conceited fool too!—you should hear him in the lobby of the House, chattering about his friend the Earl, to whom he thinks himself of such importance. Who is he—do you know?”

“Oh, a country squire, just knighted. Not a bad fellow, Lord Cosmo says, very rich, and with such a charming wife! Might do well enough among his familiar turnips—but here? Why will he make himself such an ass!”

To be half conscious of a truth one's self, and to hear it broadly stated by other people, are two very different things. Josephine shrank back, feeling for the moment as if whipped with nettles; till she remembered they were only nettles, not swords. No moral delinquency had been cast up against her husband; and for the rest, what did it matter?—she knew it all before: and, in spite of her fine French sense of *comme il faut*, and her pure high breeding, she had learned to put up with it. She could do so still.

Pushing with difficulty through the throng, she rejoined Sir Edward. “Keep close to me,” she said. “Don't leave me again, pray.”

“Very well, my dear; but— Ah! there are two friends of mine!” And in his impulsive way he introduced to her at once the very young men who had been speaking of him.

Lady de Bougainville bowed, looking them both right in the face with those stern unflinching eyes of hers; and, young men of fashion as they were, they both blushed scarlet. Then, putting her arm through her husband's, she walked deliberately on, carrying her head very erect, to the select circle where, glittering under a blaze of ancestral diamonds, and scarcely recognizable as the old lady who had traveled in such quiet, almost shabby simplicity, stood the little, brown, withered, but still courtly and dignified Countess of Turberville.

“Stop,” whispered Sir Edward, in unwonted timidity. “It is so very—very awkward. I do hope her ladyship has forgotten. Must I apologize? What in the world am I to say to her? Josephine, do stop one minute.”

Josephine obeyed.

And here let me too pause, lest I might be misconstrued in the picture which I draw—I own in not too flattering colors—of Sir Edward de Bougainville.

It was not his low origin, not the shadow of the Scanlan porter-bottles, which made him what he was. I have known gentlemen whose fathers were plowmen—nay, the truest gentleman I ever knew was the son of a working mechanic. And I have seen boors who had titles, and who, in spite of the noble lineage of centuries, were boors still. What made this man vulgar was the innate coarseness of his nature, lacquered over with superficial refine-

ment. He was, in fact, that which, in all ranks of life, is the very opposite of a gentleman—a sham. I do not love him, but I will not be unfair to him; and if I hold him up to contempt, I wish it clearly to be understood what are the things I despise him for.

Did his wife despise him? How can one tell? We often meet men and their wives, concerning whom we ask of ourselves the same question, and wonder how they ever came to be united; yet the wives move in society with smiling countenances, and perform unshrinkingly their various duties, as Lady de Bougainville performed hers.

“Shall we go on now?” she said, and led her husband forward to the dreadful ordeal. But it passed over quite harmlessly—rather worse than harmlessly; for the Countess merely bowed, smiling upon them as upon all her other guests, and apparently scarcely recognizing them, in that dense, ever-moving throng. They went on with it, and never saw their hostess again all the evening. The sole reward they gained for three hours of pushing and scrambling, heated rooms and an infinitesimal quantity of refreshment, was the pleasure of seeing their names in the paper next day among the Countess of Turberville’s four hundred invited guests.

This was Lady de Bougainville’s first and last experience of “shining in society”—that is, London society, which alone Sir Edward thought worth every thing. He paid for it with several days of illness, brought on by the heat and excitement, and perhaps the disappointment too, though to the latter he never owned. After that he was glad enough to go home.

Oh, how Josephine’s heart leaped when she saw, nestling among the green hills, the gray outline of Oldham Court! She had, more than any one I ever knew, the quality of adhesiveness, not only to persons but places. She had loved Wren’s Nest, though her husband’s incessant schemes for quitting it, and her own constant terror for the future, made her never feel settled there; but Oldham Court, besides being her ideal of a house to live in, was her own house, her home, from which fate now seemed powerless to uproot her. She clung to it, as had she been one of those happy wives who carry their home about with them, she never might have clung; but things being as they were, it was well she did do so—well that she could accept what she had, and rejoice in it, without craving for the impossible.

After their return she had a wonderfully quiet and happy summer. Her children came about her, from school and college, enjoying their holidays the more for the hard work between. And her husband found something to do, something to amuse himself with; he was appointed a magistrate for the county, and devoted himself, with all his Irish eagerness after novelty, to the administration of justice upon all offenders. Being not only a magistrate but

a clergyman, he considered himself bound to lay on the moral whip as heavily as possible, until his wife, who had long lost with him the title of “Themis,” sometimes found it necessary to go after him, not as Justice, but as Mercy, binding up the wounds he made.

“You see,” he said, “in my position, and with the morality of the whole district in my keeping, I must be severe. I must pass over nothing, or people will think I am lax myself.”

And many was the poor fellow he committed to the county jail for having unfortunately a fish in his hat or a young leveret in his pocket; many was the case of petty larceny that he dealt with according to the utmost rigor of the law. It was his chief amusement, this rigid exercise of authority, and he really enjoyed it exceedingly.

Happily, it served to take off his attention from his three sons, who were coming to that age when to press the yoke of paternal rule too tightly upon young growing shoulders is sometimes rather dangerous. All the boys, César especially, instinctively gave their father as wide a berth as possible. Not that he ignored them as he once used to do; on the contrary, to strangers he was rather fond of talking about “my eldest son at Oxford,” and “my two boys who are just going to Rugby.” But inside the house he interfered little with them, and had no more of their company than was inevitable.

With their mother it was quite different. Now, as heretofore, she was all in all to them, and they to her. Walking, riding, or driving together, they had her quite to themselves: enjoying with her the new-found luxuries of their life.

“Mamma, how beautiful you look in that nice gown!—the very picture of a Lady de Bougainville!” they would say, in their fond boyish admiration. And she, when she watched them ride out on their pretty ponies, and was able to give them dogs and guns, and every thing that boys delight in, exulted in the fortunate wealth, and blessed Mr. Oldham in her heart.

In truth, under this strong maternal influence, and almost wholly maternal guidance, her sons were growing up every thing that she desired to see them. Making all allowance for the tender exaggerations of memory—I believe, even from Bridget’s account, that the young De Bougainvilles must have been very good boys—honest, candid, generous, affectionate; the comfort and pride of their happy mother during this first year of prosperity.

Even after she had dispatched them, each by turn, to school and college, she was not sad. She had only sent them away to do their fitting work in the world, and she knew they would do it well. She trusted them, young as they were, and oh! the blessing of trust!—almost greater than that of love. And she had plenty of love, too, daily surrounding her, both from the boys away and the three girls at home. With one or other of her six children her time and thoughts



LADY DE BOUGAINVILLE AND THE COUNTESS.

were incessantly occupied. Mothers, real mothers, be they rich or poor, have seldom leisure either to grow morbid or to grieve.

Of all the many portraits extant of her, perhaps the one I like the best is a daguerreotype by Claudet, taken during this bright year. It is not a flattered likeness, of course—the gray hairs and wrinkles are plain to be seen—but it has a sweetness, a composed, placid content, greater than any other of the various portraits of Lady de Bougainville.

It came home from London, she once told me, on a very momentous day, so much so that it was put aside, locked up, and never looked at for months and years.

Some hours before, she had parted from her eldest boy, who was returning to Oxford, sorry to leave his mother and his home, but yet glad to be at work again. She had seen him off, driving his father, who had to take his place for the first time on the bench of magistrates, to the county town, and now she sat thinking of her son—how exactly he looked the character of “the young heir,” and how excessively like he was to her own father—outwardly and inwardly every inch a De Bougainville. He

seemed to grow up day by day in her sight, as Wordsworth’s Young Romilly in that of his mother, “a delightful tree”—

“And proudly did his branches wave.”

She felt that under their shadow she might yet rejoice, and have in her declining age many blessed days. Days as calm and lovely as this October afternoon; when the hills lay quiet, transfigured in golden light, and the old gray house itself shone with a beauty as sweet and yet solemn as that of an old woman’s face; the face that sometimes, when she looked in the glass, she tried to fancy, wondering how her sons would look at it some of these days. Only her sons. For the world outside, and its comments upon her, Josephine, from first to last, never cared two straws.

Yet she was not unsocial, and sometimes, both for herself and her children’s sake, would have preferred a less lonely life than they had at Oldham Court—would have liked occasionally to mix with persons of her own sphere and on the level of her own cultivation. Now her only friends were the poor people of the neighborhood, among whom she went about a good

deal, and who looked up to her as to the Lady Bountiful of the whole country-side.

But that day she had enjoyed some pleasure in a long talk with the last person she expected to see or to fraternize with—Lady Turberville. They had met at the cottage of an old woman, to whom Josephine had been very kind. The Countess also; only, as she herself owned, her charities were necessarily limited. “You are a much richer woman than I,” she had said, with a proud frankness, as she stood tucking up her gown-skirt to walk back the three miles to the Hall, and eyed with good-natured, but half-satirical glance, Lady de Bougainville’s splendid carriage, which had just drawn up to the cottage-door.

Josephine explained that she had intended to take the paralytic old woman a drive.

“But, since it rains so fast, if Lady Turberville would—”

“If she would give you the chance of being kind to one old woman instead of another? Well, as I am rheumatic, and neighborly kindness is pleasant, will you drive me home?”

“Gladly,” said Lady de Bougainville. And they became quite friendly before they reached the Hall.

Altogether the strong shrewd simplicity of the old Countess—she was about sixty-five, but looked older, from her worn face and plain, almost common style of dress—had refreshed and amused Josephine very much. While heartily despising the doctrine, that it is advisable to pull one’s self up in the world by hanging on to the skirts of great people, she yet had acuteness enough to see that, both for one’s self and one’s children, it is well to cultivate good, suitable, and pleasant society; not to hide one’s head in a hole, but to see a little of the world, and choose out of it those friends or acquaintance from whom we can get, or to whom we can give, the best, the most sympathy and companionship.

“My girls have no friends at all now,” thought she, “and they will want some. Adrienne must come out this winter; poor little Adrienne!” And she sighed, reflecting that in their present limited circle Miss de Bougainville’s “coming out,” would be in a very moderate form indeed. “Still she must in time get to know a few people, and she ought to learn to make friends, as Lady Turberville said. If Lady Susan and Lady Emily are like their mother, they might be good companions for my poor Adrienne!”

And then the mother’s mind wandered off in all sorts of directions, as mothers’ minds and hearts always do: to César on his journey to Oxford; to Louis and Martin at school; and back again to her little girls at home. Catherine was still “the baby,” and treated as such; but Gabrielle at thirteen looked nearly as womanly as Adrienne. And Gabrielle would certainly grow up beautiful—how beautiful, with her coquettish and impulsive temperament, the mother was almost afraid to think. Still she was

secretly very proud of her, as she was of all her children.

She sat a long time thinking of them all, and watching the sun disappear behind the hills, setting in glory upon what seemed to have been the loveliest day of the whole season, and the most enjoyable.

Alas! it was her last day of enjoyment, her last day of peace.

CHAPTER XVI.

SIR EDWARD did not come home till very late that evening, at which his wife was not surprised; he had said that his duties would keep him late, and that he should very likely dine with his brother magistrates afterward. She concluded he had done so; but when she asked him, he said abruptly, No.

“Food! give me some food. And wine too, for I am quite exhausted. You seem as if you took a pleasure in starving me.”

Josephine looked up astonished, so irritable was his tone, so wild and worried his look.

“Something has happened. What is it? Is César—”

“You always think of César first, never of me. Yes, he is all right: he staid with me and saw me off before his own train started.”

“And you—Edward, is there any thing wrong with you?” asked she, taking his hand in a sort of remorse. But he flung hers off.

“Did I say there was any thing wrong? Why do you look at me so? There is nothing the matter with me.”

But there was; and by-and-by she discovered it. A thing which at first he made light of, as of no importance whatever to a gentleman in his position, but which, when little by little she learned its whole bearing, and saw with frightfully clear eyes its possible results, was to Josephine one of those sudden blows which seem often to come upon us poor mortals like thunderbolts, when the air is most still, and there had seemed an hour ago not a cloud in the sky.

Be sure, soon or late, a man’s sin will find him out. He, and others for him, may sedulously hide it a while; it may appear safely buried, so that no evil consequences can possibly ensue. But, by-and-by, a bird of the air carries the matter, and in one form or another retribution comes.

By some means—how was never discovered, for Josephine thought she had taken all precautions against such a fatality—that “little bird” began to whisper abroad, not as a public accusation but as a tale of private scandal, how the Reverend Edward Scanlan had willfully falsified the accounts of the new school at Ditchley, and used for his own benefit the money which had been intrusted to him. And though the charity had suffered no loss, the defalcations being by some ingenious method or other discovered and replaced in time, still the fact remained; and those people who are always ready

to envy a man his sudden prosperity bruited it about from mouth to mouth, till it became the talk of the county.

Curiously enough, the scandal had been a good while in reaching its victims. Sir Edward was not a sensitive man, quick to discover any slight indications of coolness toward himself; and, besides, the report had lain smouldering in Ditchley town, where he never went, for weeks before it reached the ears of the country gentlemen, who were mostly stanch old Tories, too proud to listen to the gossip of the lower classes. But having once heard it, and, so far as they could, verified it, they resented in a body this intrusion upon their order, and especially upon the magisterial bench, of a man whom only a lucky chance had saved from the disgrace of a public prosecution. He was in no danger of this now, but as far as honorable repute went, his character was gone.

"Only think, Josephine," said he, piteously, when he had confessed all to his wife, "all my neighbors gave me the cold shoulder; and one or two of them actually hinted the reason why. Such a fuss about nothing! You paid the money back, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Then what did it matter? These English people make money their god. Even Lord Turberville, who I thought would protect me—he had only just come home, and heard nothing of this unfortunate report till to-day—his lordship took no notice of me on the bench, and said to Langhorne, that he thought the wisest thing I could do would be to send in my resignation immediately."

"I think so too," said, with white lips, Josephine de Bougainville.

It was no use weeping or complaining. The miserable man before her needed all her support—all her pity. Under the blow which had fallen upon him he sank, as usual, utterly crushed and weak—weaker than any woman. Such men always are.

"They will hunt me down like a hare, these accursed country squires," moaned he. "I shall never be able to hold up my head in the county again. And just when I was getting on so well, and the Turbervilles were come home; and they might have taken us by the hand and helped us into society. It's very hard!"

"It is hard," said Josephine, beneath her breath; and as she looked round the cheerful drawing-room, so handsome yet so home-like, her whole external possessions, her money, her title, her name, seemed to become valueless. She would have given them all to secure to her children that blessing which, though, thank God, many families have struggled on without it, is yet the safest strong-hold and dearest pride of any family—a father's unstained, honorable name.

"But what are we to do, Josephine? Tell me, what are we to do?"

She turned and saw him crouched—all but kneeling at her feet—the man who was tied to her for life; who, with all his faults, was not a

deliberate villain; and who now, as was his wont, in his distress took refuge with her, and her alone. For a moment she shrank from him—an expression of pain, unutterable pain—perhaps something worse than pain—passed over her face, and then she feebly smiled.

"I can not answer you at once. Give me time to think."

"Very well. Only, Josephine, do remember what your poor husband has suffered this day. For God's sake, do not you be unkind to me!"

"No, I will not. It is for God's sake," she repeated to herself, with a deep meaning; almost as deep and earnest as a prayer.

During her many hours of solitary musings—more numerous now than ever in her life—Josephine had learned much. That burning sense of wrong—wrong done to herself and her children by their father, had in some measure died out; she looked upon him sorrowfully, as being chiefly his own enemy: she could protect both them and herself from him now. And in another way her mind had changed; she began dimly to guess at the solemn truth, without which all life becomes a confused haze—that what we do for people is not for themselves, or for ourselves, but for something higher. Thus, it was for God's sake, not for his own, she resolved to hold fast to her husband.

"Edward," she said, "indeed I never mean to be unkind to you; but this is a terrible grief to me. To be sure, the thing is not much worse known than unknown, except so far as it affects the children. Had César any idea of it, do you think?"

"Yes—no. Well, yes; I told him something of it," stammered Sir Edward. "I had nobody else to speak to, and he saw how broken-down and upset I was. Poor fellow! he insisted on seeing me safe off home before he started himself for Oxford. I must say César behaved very well to me to-day."

"My good boy!" muttered the mother; and then with a thrill of maternal suffering at how he might suffer—"Oh, my poor César!"

"César—always César! Can't you for one moment think of me?"

Ay, that was the key to this man's life. He had never thought but of himself, and himself alone. Such a one—and oh, what hundreds there are like him!—ought never to be either husband or father.

Josephine turned grave, reproachful eyes upon him—the dead weight who had dragged her down all her days. It always had been so—apparently it was to be so to the end.

"Edward, consider a little, and you will find I do think of you; but there is plenty of time. We have no need to do any thing in haste—if indeed," with a sigh, "any thing remains to be done."

And there came helplessly the thought upon her of how little could be done. A lie she could have fought against; but there was no fighting against the truth. In a gentle way she said as much.

"True or not, Josephine, I'll not bear it. Am I, with all my Irish talent, to be a by-word among those clodhopping English squires? They hate me because I am Irish. I always knew that. But I'll soon teach them differently. I, with my wealth, could take a position wherever I pleased. We'll leave this place immediately."

"Leave this place?"

"And I shall be only too glad of the opportunity to quit this horrid old house; you know I always disliked it. We can't sell it, more's the pity! but we could easily let it, and we will."

"We will not," said Josephine, roused to desperation.

"But I say we will, and I am master here!" cried Sir Edward, violently. "I have been planning it the whole way home," added he, more pacifically, as he saw that his wrath had not the slightest effect upon his wife. It only tightened the shut lips, and gave an added paleness to the steady, firm features. "We can give out that your health requires us to winter abroad, and go quietly away in a week or two. Once gone, we need never come back any more."

"Never come back any more? When I loved the place so; when I had settled down here for life, and was so happy!—so happy! Husband, you are very cruel to me! And Heaven is cruel too. My troubles are more than I can bear."

She sat down, wringing her hands. A kind of despair came over her—the sudden reaction which we often feel when trouble follows a lull of peace—as sharp as the first chill of returning winter. But we get accustomed to it presently. So did she.

Against this scheme of her husband's—very natural to him, for his first thought in any difficulty was to run away—Lady de Bougainville at first rebelled with all her might. She refused point-blank to quit her home—though she were ignored by the whole county, and though the arrows of evil tongues were to fly around her head as thick as hail.

"I am not afraid; I have done nothing," she said, haughtily. "No possible blame can attach to the children or me. And, even with regard to what has been, since nobody was really injured and it will never happen again, would it not be possible to remain and live it down?"

So reasoned she with Mr. Langhorne, who was the only person whom in her extremity she took counsel of: confessed the whole thing, and asked him what he thought would be the wisest course.

"For my children's sake—my children, you see," pleaded the poor mother. Of herself she cared nothing; would gladly have hidden her head any where in merciful obscurity: "Had I not better stay here and brave it out? Nobody could bring up the tale so as to harm the children."

Mr. Langhorne hesitated. He knew the world better than she did. Still, she was so bent upon remaining that she resisted him as much as she did her husband, who, cowed by her determined will, assumed the air of a much-injured and most patient man, told her to "have it all her own way; he should never say another word on the subject."

But he did though: reverting to it day after day with the worrying persistency of a weak soul that tries by every underhand means to shake a stronger one. Alas! only too often succeeding.

For a few weeks Lady de Bougainville bore all her misery at home, all her slights abroad—some imaginary, perhaps, but others real enough. For the taint of "something dishonorable" attached to a family—especially in a thinly-populated country district, ignorant of the tricks of trade, great or small, which are practiced in larger communities—is a thing not easily removed. Long after its exact circumstances are forgotten the vague stigma remains. In proportion to his former popularity, his old parishioners, and indeed the whole county, now viewed with extreme severity the Reverend Sir Edward de Bougainville.

Several times Josephine drove purposely to Ditchley, showing her face to the world at large, and calling upon the people she knew; but they were all rather cold to her, and some barely civil. Lady Turberville, whom she one day accidentally met, though not uncourteous—for the old lady stopped to speak to her, and had a tone of sympathy in her voice—still made not the slightest inquiry after Sir Edward, and gave no hint of the proposed visit of the Ladies Susan and Emily to Oldham Court. In short, that slight, untangible coolness, that "sending to Coventry," which in a provincial neighborhood is, socially, the ruin of any family, had obviously befallen the De Bougainvilles. Once begun, these things always increase rather than diminish; and however she might shut her eyes to it, Josephine could not help seeing before her and hers a future of splendid loneliness, duller and drearier even than poverty.

Then, too, an uncomfortable change, physical and mental, came over her husband. The shock of his sudden fortunes had thrown him into a rather excited condition. He had been top-heavy with prosperity, so to speak, and against this sudden bleak wind of adversity he could not fight at all. He fell into a low way, refused to do any thing or go any where, and sat all day long shivering over the fire, bemoaning his hard lot, and complaining that the world was all against him, as it had been from his youth up. He could not bear his wife out of his sight, yet when she was in it he was always scolding her, saying she was killing him by inches in keeping him at Oldham Court.

"Can it be really so? What is the matter with him?" she asked of Dr. Waters, whom she had at last secretly summoned—for Sir Edward refused all medical advice, saying that the sight

of a doctor was as good, or as bad, as a death-warrant.

Dr. Waters made no immediate reply. Perhaps he really had none to give. That mysterious disease called softening of the brain, which seems to attack the weakest and the strongest brains—letting the lucky mediocre ones go free—was then unnamed in medical science; yet I think, by all accounts, its earliest symptoms must even then have been developing in Josephine's husband. She knew it not—nobody knew it; but its results were painful enough, throwing a cloud of gloom over the whole family. And upon this state of things the younger boys—planning their first Christmas at Oldham Court, yule-logs and guisards, according to the merry Christmas-keeping of all the wealthy families in the county—came ignorantly home. César too—but César was not ignorant, though in all his letters he had never yet said a word of what he knew. He only held his mother's hand sometimes, and followed her tenderly about the house, and made things as easy for her as he could; but he seemed to think—it was his nature and had been his grandfather's too, she remembered—that the easiest thing was silence.

"Perhaps, after all," said Dr. Waters, on his second visit, "it would be better to go."

"To leave home, you mean, as my husband wishes—for a time?"

"Yes, for a time," repeated the doctor, with his eyes cast down. "Long or short, as may be advisable. Change of scene, without delay, is, I think, very necessary for Sir Edward. And for the boys—they have but a dull life here. You will return in triumph," added he, cheerfully, "in time to have an ox roasted whole, and all sorts of rejoicings when César comes of age."

Lady de Bougainville turned sharply away. How all her delights had crumbled down to dust and ashes! Alas, to what sort of an inheritance would he come, her handsome young heir? And who would stand up and wish him the heir's best benediction, that he might tread in his father's footsteps all his days?

Nevertheless, she could but follow where fate led, and do the best that seemed possible for the time being. So standing at her favorite oriel window, looking down the straight evergreen alleys of her beloved garden, where the holly berries shone scarlet in the winter sun, and the arbutus-trees were glittering under the first white dust of snow, she made up her mind to leave Oldham Court; to slip the dear, safe anchor of home, and go drifting about upon the wide world.

Some may count this a very small thing—a very infinitesimal sacrifice; but I know better. However, it was made; and having once put her hand to the plow she never looked back, but drove it straight through her pleasant flowers with a firm remorseless hand.

Of course, her husband was delighted. She had come to her senses at last, and he congrat-

ulated her accordingly. He laid plan after plan of what he should like best to do, what would amuse him most; and at last thought, considering it was winter time, and rather too early for the London season, it would be well to adopt a suggestion which somebody or other threw out, and take a tour through the cathedral towns of England.

"You see, this will be particularly suitable for me in my character of a clergyman." For since politics and the Earl of Turberville had lost their charm he went back upon that, and became once more stricter than ever in his religious observances.

Josephine cared little where she went. So, mostly by chance, the thing was decided. They were to begin with Canterbury.

"But you don't want to take the children with us, my dear?" said Sir Edward, querulously. "I shall have no pleasure at all if I am bothered with a lot of children at my heels." So Josephine gave this up too.

Her last few days at Oldham Court appeared, she herself once told me, to have fled exactly like a dream. The whole thing was done suddenly—leaving the children behind in charge of the good governess and Bridget. She intended to come back and shut up the house, for she obstinately refused to let it; but still, when the carriage slowly ascended the hilly road, and she looked down on the gray gables, nestling in sunshine in the valley below, she had a fatal foreboding that she should never see Oldham Court again. She never did.

I do not mean to make any pathetic scene out of all this. Many persons might say that all Lady de Bougainville's regrets on the subject were mere morbid imagination, when she had so many tangible blessings left her to enjoy. It might be, and yet I pity her, and can understand how she fell into a kind of dull despondency, very unusual for her, which lasted for several days.

Out of it she was roused by a chance incident; one of those small things which are often the pivot upon which much greater things turn. Wandering round Canterbury cathedral aimlessly enough—for Sir Edward took little interest in ecclesiastical architecture, and was much more interested in finding out where the Deansery was, and whether he ought not to call upon the Dean, whom he had once met, and who would probably ask them to dinner—Lady de Bougainville came upon the queer old door leading to that portion of the crypt which, ever since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes—indeed, I believe, earlier still—has been assigned by law and custom to the use of the French Protestants whose forefathers had taken refuge in England. While asking a question or two of the verger, she dimly recollecting having heard of the place before. Her father had once "assisted" at a Sunday service there, and described it to her. Keenly interested, she tried to peer through the cracks in the door and the spidery windows. Little was to be seen;



OLDHAM COURT.

but she managed to catch a few glimpses of the interior, the low-arched ceiling, whitewashed like the walls; the plain, common wooden pews and pulpit, whereon lay a book, torn and worm-eaten—a centuries-old French Huguenot Bible—for she could read the words "Saincte Ecriture" on the open title-page.

A strange contrast it was, this poor, plain—pathetically plain—little conventicle, to the magnificent cathedral overhead, where she had just been hearing service; but it suited her present state of mind exactly. Sickened of wealth, feeling the hollowness of the sham pomps about her, her heart seemed to spring back like an overbent bow to the noble poverty of her childish days, to the rigid uncompromising faith of her French forefathers.

"Every Sunday they have service here, you say?" she asked of the verger. "Edward, shall we go to-morrow? I should like it very much."

"I dare say: you always do like common and ungenteeel places. No, I would not be seen there upon any account."

"No matter," she thought, "I will go alone." And next day, while her husband was taking a long sleep, she sallied forth through the rainy streets; wrapping herself up in her cloak, and trudging on, almost as Mrs. Scanlan used to trudge, in days gone by. No fear, she thought, of her being recognized as Lady de Bougainville.

And yet, when she passed under the low door of the crypt, entering side by side with that small and rather queer-looking congrega-

tion, chiefly French artificers of various sorts, with their wives and families, descendants of the early *émigrés* or later comers into the town, who, but for this ancient institution of service under the cathedral, would probably long ago have forgotten their religion and race, and become altogether amalgamated with the inhabitants of Canterbury; when she looked at them, and heard in faint whispers that tongue of another land, as they noticed the rare presence of a stranger among them—Josephine began to feel strange stirrings in her heart.

It is curious, as we advance in middle life, especially when there is a great gulf between that life and our childish one, how sharp and distinct the latter grows! For years, except in her children's caressing chatter, Josephine had scarcely heard the sound of her native tongue—that is, her ancestors' tongue, for, as I said, she herself had been born after her parents quitted France; nor since childhood had she been in any place of worship like that which her father used to take her to—a bare meeting-house, rough as this, of which it strongly reminded her. When she sat down, it almost seemed as if the old Vicomte sat beside her with his gentle "*Soi sage, ma petite fille.*" And when the minister, in his high French intonation, a little "singsong" and long drawn out, began to read: "*L'Évangile selon Saint Jean, chapitre premier. La Parole était au commencement: la Parole était avec Dieu, et la Parole était Dieu*"—old times came back upon her so forcibly that it was with difficulty she could restrain her tears.

What the congregation thought of her she knew not, cared not. Possibly, for many Sundays after, those simple people talked of and looked for the strange lady who that Sunday had worshiped with them—whether Frenchwoman or Englishwoman they could not tell, only that she had left in the alms-box several bright English sovereigns, which helped on the poor of the flock through a very hard winter. She came and she went, speaking to nobody, and nobody venturing to speak to her, but the influence of those two hours effected in her mind a complete revolution.

"I will go home," she said to herself, as she walked back through Canterbury streets, still in the pelting rain; "home to my father's faith and my father's people, if any of them yet remain. I will bring up my children not English but French; after the noble old Huguenot pattern, such as my father used to tell me of, and such as he was himself. *Mon père, mon père!*"

It was a dream, of course, springing out of her entire ignorance; as Utopian as many another fancy which she had cherished, only to see it melt away like a breaking wave; still at present it was forced so strongly upon her mind that it gave her a gleam of new hope. Almost as soon as she returned to the hotel, she proposed to her husband, with feigned carelessness, for he now generally objected to any thing which he saw she had set her heart upon—that instead of continuing their tour in this gloomy weather, they should at once send for the children, cross the Channel, and spend the New Year in Paris, *le jour de l'an* being such a very amusing time.

"Is it?" said Sir Edward, catching at the notion. "And I want amusing so much! Yes, I think I should like to go. How soon could we start?"

"I think, within a week."

She despised herself for humoring him; for leading him by means of his whims instead of his reason to needless ends, but she was often obliged to do both now. A curious kind of artfulness, and childish irritability mingled with senile obstinacy, often seized him; when he was very difficult to manage; he who as a young man had been so pleasant and good-tempered, in truth a better temper than she. But things were different now.

Ere her husband could change his mind, which he was apt to do, and ere the novelty of the fresh idea wore off, Lady de Bougainville hastily made all her arrangements, left Oldham Court in the hands of Mr. Langhorne; sent for her children and some of her servants, and almost before she recognized the fact herself, was in the land of her forefathers, the very city where more than one of the last generation of them had expiated on the guillotine the crime of having been noble, in the best sense of the word, for centuries. As Josephine drove through the streets in the chilly winter dusk, she thought with a curious fancy of how her

father must have looked, wakened early one morning, a poor crying child, to see the death-cart, with his father in it, go by; and again, with a shudder, how her beautiful great-aunt must have felt when the cold steel first touched her neck. Ah! but those were terrible times, to be so near behind us as seventy years!

Paris, such as Lady de Bougainville then saw it, and as long afterward she used to describe it to me, lingering with the loving garrulousness of age upon things, and places, and people, all swept away into the gulf of the past—ancient Paris exists no more. Imperial "improvements," so-called, have swept away nearly all its historical landmarks, and made it, what probably its present ruler most desired it should be made, a city without a history. When I visited it myself, wishful as I was to retrace the steps of our dear old friend, and tell her on our return about these places she knew, we could find almost none of them. Except the quaint old Rue St. Honoré, where in an hotel, half French, half English, which Sir Edward took a fancy to, she lived during her whole residence there.

I know not if it were the stirring of the mercurial ancestral blood, or merely the bright, clear, sunshiny atmosphere, but Lady de Bougainville felt her heart lighter as soon as she entered Paris. She was not one to mourn over the inevitable; Oldham Court was left behind, but she had many pleasant things surrounding her still. She went sight-seeing almost every morning with her happy children, and of afternoons she took her daily drive with Sir Edward, showing him every thing she could think of to amuse him—and he really was amused, for the time. His health and spirits revived; he confessed Paris was a pleasant place to winter in, or would be, as soon as they came to know people, and to be known. With this end in view he haunted Galignani's, and was on the *qui vive* for all the English visitors to the hotel, in case some of their names might be familiar to him.

But in Paris, as in London, came the same difficulty inevitable under the circumstances. Socially, the De Bougainvilles had not yet risen to the level of their money, and beyond a certain point it helped them little. They were almost as lonely, and as entirely without acquaintances, in the Rue St. Honoré as they had been in St. James's Street. Vainly did Sir Edward harry his wife's memory for the name of every noble family with whom her father had had to do, hoping to hunt them out, and thrust himself upon them. Vainly, too, did he urge her to leave a card at the British Embassy, or even at the Tuilleries, for one De Bougainville had been about fifty years ago a very faithful friend to one of the Orleans family. But something—was it pride or was it shame—or perhaps merely natural reticence?—made Josephine steadily and firmly decline these backstairs methods of getting into society.

César, too, who was nearly grown up now,

had a great dislike to the thing. "Mamma," he would say, "if people do not seek us of their own accord, and for ourselves, I had rather have no friends or acquaintance at all. We can do very well without them."

"I think so too," said Lady de Bougainville. But she did not perplex herself much about the matter. She knew the lack was only temporary. Every time she looked at her son, who to his natural grace was daily adding that air of manliness and gentlemanliness which the associations of University life give to almost every young fellow, more or less, she smiled to herself with perfect content. There was no fear of her César's not making friends every where by-and-by.

He was her consolation for a good many things which she found difficult to bear. Not great things; she had no heavy troubles now; but little vexations. It was sometimes very trying to watch the slight shrugs or covert smiles with which the civil Frenchmen he met at *tables d'hôte*, theatres, etc., commented silently on the brusquerie or "bumptiousness" of the rich *milord Anglais*, who was always asserting his right to the best of every thing. For in a foreign country, more patent than ever becomes the fact that, however his rank or wealth, no thoroughly selfish man ever is, or even appears, a gentleman.

Rich as Sir Edward was, he found that when one's only key to society is a golden one, it takes a good while to fit it in. He was growing weary of the delay, and speculating whether it would not be well to leave Paris, when the magic "open sesame" to his heart's desire arrived in a very unexpected way.

With a vague yearning after her father's faith, dimly as she understood it, a restless seeking after something upon which to stay her soul, sickened with the religious hollowness amidst which she had lived so long, Josephine went, Sunday after Sunday, to the French Protestant Chapel. Not that the preacher could teach much—few preachers can, to hearers like herself, whose sharp experience of life mocks all dogmatizing as mere idle words; it is God only who can bring faith to a soul which has lost all faith in man. But she liked to listen to the mellifluous French of the good old minister—liked too the simplicity of the service, and the evident earnestness of the congregation. An earnestness quite different from that of the worshipers she saw in Catholic churches, though this was touching too. She often envied those poor kneeling women praying even to a Saint or a Holy Virgin in whom they could believe.

But these French Protestants seemed to worship God as she thought He would best desire to be worshiped—open-eyed, fearless-hearted, even as their forefathers and hers had done, in valleys and caves, persecuted and hunted to death, yet never renouncing Him. The difference, so difficult to understand, between faith and superstition, was there still. She often fancied that in these nineteenth-century faces

| she could still detect gleams of the old Huguenot spirit, with its strength, its courage, its unparalleled self-devotion. A spirit as different from that of Catholic France as that of the Puritans and Covenanters was from that corrupt Court of the Stuarts.

She was in a dream of this kind, such as she fell into almost every Sunday—when, looking up, she saw among these stranger faces a face she knew; and as soon as service was over she hurried after the person, who was Priscilla Nunn.

"How came you here? Who would have expected it? My good Priscilla, I am so glad to see you—so very glad!"

The woman courtesied, looking pleased, said she had watched "my Lady" for several Sundays, but thought perhaps my Lady did not care to notice her. That she had given up business and gone back to her old profession, and was now living as nurse and humble companion with Lady Emma Lascelles.

"She is very ill, my Lady—will never be better. She often speaks of you. Shall I tell her I saw you?"

"No—yes," hesitated Josephine, for she had been a little wounded by Lady Emma's long silence, which, however, this illness explained. She stood perplexed, but still cordially holding Priscilla by the hand, when she saw her husband waiting for her in the carriage, and watching her with astonished suspicious eyes. Hastily she gave her address, and joined him; for she well knew what vials of wrath would be poured out upon her devoted head. As was really the case, until Sir Edward discovered with whom the obnoxious Priscilla was living.

"Lady Emma! Then you must at once call upon her. She may be of the greatest service to you. She used to be so very fond of you. Where is she residing?"

Josephine had never asked; but her pride or reticence was rendered needless by Mr. Lascelles's appearing the very next day to entreat her to visit his wife, who was longing to see her.

So, without more ado, Lady de Bougainville put on her bonnet as rapidly as Mrs. Scanlan used to do, and went alone, a street's length, to the quiet faubourg, where, surrounded by all Parisian elegance and luxury, the young creature, who had once come to Ditchley as a bride, lay fading away. She had lost child after child—hopes rising only to be blighted; and now, far gone in consumption, was slipping peacefully out of a world which upon her had opened so brightly and closed so soon. Yet she still took her usual warm human interest in it, and was exceedingly glad to see again Lady de Bougainville.

"An old friend in a new face," she said, smiling; "but nothing would ever much alter you. I am glad my cousin left you all his money; nobody else wanted it, and you can make good use of it, and enjoy it too. You have your children." And poor Lady Emma burst into tears.

After this the two women renewed all their former intimacy; and as Mr. Lascelles knew every body, and surrounded his wife with as many pleasant people as he could think of, to amuse her, it so happened that this mere chance, occurring through such an humble medium as Priscilla Nunn, furnished the means by which the De Bougainvilles entered into Parisian society. Really good society, such as even Sir Edward approved; for it included people of higher rank than, in his wildest ambition, he had ever expected to mix with.

The Court, then resident at Paris, must have been, so long as it lasted, one of the best and purest Courts which France has ever known. Whatever its political mistakes or misfortunes, domestically it was without alloy. No one could enter the household circle of the citizen-king without admiring and loving it. High-toned, yet simple; fond of art and literature, yet rating moral worth above both these; combining the old aristocratic grace with the liberalism of the time, and assigning to rank, wealth, talent, each its fitting place and due honor—though many years have elapsed since its dispersion and downfall, all those now living who knew it speak tenderly of the Court of Louis Philippe.

Lady de Bougainville did, to her very last hour. Whether she "shone" therein, I can not tell—she never said so; but she keenly enjoyed it. More, certainly, than her husband, who, after his first flush of delight, found himself a little out of his element there. He could not understand the perfect simplicity of those great people, who could associate with poor authors and artists upon equal terms; who were friendly and kind to their servants; and who, instead of going about all day with allegorical crowns on their heads, were in reality very quiet persons, who would condescend to the commonest things and pursuits—such as shocked much a grand personage like Sir Edward de Bougainville. He was altogether puzzled, and sometimes a little uncomfortable; finally he held aloof, and let his wife go into society alone, or with the companionship of her daughter.

Adrienne "came out." Sitting beside her beautiful mother, as shy and silent as any French demoiselle, but much amused by what she saw around her, she looked on, taking little share in the gay world, until she saw herself put forward as a desirable "*partie*" by an energetic French mother, when she turned in frightened appeal to her own, and the "*prétendu*" was speedily extinguished. Nevertheless, in spite of her plain looks and defect in figure, the reported large "*dot*" of Mademoiselle de Bougainville attracted several chances of marriage, to which Adrienne was as indifferent—and even amused—as her mother could desire.

But henceforth Josephine often thought with some anxiety of this dear child, so unlike herself, so unfit to battle with the world. Shrinking, timid, easily led and influenced, Adrienne

inherited much from her father, and almost nothing from her mother, except her uprightness and sincerity.

"If you do marry," Lady de Bougainville sometimes said to her, "it must be some one who will be very good to you, some one whom I can entirely trust, or I shall break my heart! Sometimes I hope, my darling, that you will not marry at all."

"Very likely not, mamma," Adrienne would answer, blushing brightly. "I certainly would rather not marry a Frenchman."

So the mother rested, content that none of these gay young fellows, who, she felt sure, only sought her for her money, had touched the heart of her young daughter, whom she still called fondly her "little" girl.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN they had been a year at Paris, or near it—for in the fashionable season for "*la campagne*" they drifted with the usual Parisian crowd to some place sufficiently in reach of the city not to be dull—Sir Edward began to suggest moving on. There was a curious restlessness about him which made him never settle any where. Back to Oldham Court he positively refused to go; and when the subject was fairly entered upon, Josephine found that her son César had the same repugnance. He and she had never spoken together of that fatal rumor which had been the secret cause of their sudden departure; but that the proud, honest, reticent boy knew it, and felt it acutely, she was well aware.

"No, mother," he said, when she consulted with him, for she had already learned to rest upon his premature wisdom and good sense; "don't let us go back to Oldham Court—at least not for some years. The house will take no harm, and the land is well let; Mr. Langhorne, last time he was at Oxford, told me that you will be richer by letting it than living at it; and I don't want to live there—never again! Besides," hastening to heal up a wound he thought he had made, "you see, I must be a busy man, must enter a profession, work my way up in the world, and earn my own fortune. Then, mother darling, you shall have Oldham Court for your dower-house, when you are an old lady."

She smiled, and ceased urging her point, though she was pining for a settled resting-place. At last César saw this, and went hunting about England on pedestrian tours till he succeeded in finding a place that he felt sure she would like, and his father too—a large, old-fashioned mansion; not Gothic, but belonging to the time of Queen Anne; fallen into much disrepair, but still capable of being revived into its original splendor.

"And you will have quite money enough to do this, Mr. Langhorne says," added the prudent boy. "And the doing of it would amuse

papa so much. Besides, it is such a beautiful old place; and oh, what a park! what trees! Then the rooms are so lofty, and large, and square. You might give such dinners and balls—I like a ball, you know. Dearest mother, please think twice before you throw overboard our chance of Brierley Hall."

She promised, though with little interest in the matter—as little interest as we sometimes take in places or people which are to be our destiny. And Oldham Court—which she loved so, which she had set her heart upon—she foresaw only too clearly, would never be her home any more.

Still, she would have done almost any thing to please César, who was growing up her heart's delight. He only came to Paris on passing visits, being quite taken up with his Oxford life, in which his earnest perseverance atoned for any lack of brilliant talents; and he worked for his degree like any poor lad, forgetting he was heir to a wealthy gentleman, and scarcely even remembering his twenty-first birthday, which passed by without any oxen roasted whole or other external rejoicings—except the joy of his mother that he was now a man, with his career safe in his own hands.

César was after all more of an Englishman than a Frenchman, even in spite of his resemblance to his grandfather, so strong that more than one old courtier had come up to him and welcomed the descendant of M. le Vicomte de Bougainville. But the young fellow added to his English gravity that charming French grace which we Britons often lack, and his tall figure and handsome looks made him noticeable in every *salon* where he appeared.

His proud mother had especially remarked this on one evening which had a painful close.

It was a *reception*, whither she and her son went alone together—Sir Edward having desired that Adrienne would remain at home and play dominos with him—since he had been in France he had taken greatly to that harmless game, which seemed to suit him exactly. And Adrienne had obeyed, a little reluctantly, as the reception was at a house where, timid as she was, she liked to go. For the hostess was a lady who, though too poor to "entertain" as we English understand the word—indeed, Sir Edward complained bitterly that he never got any thing at her reunions but biscuits and weak raspberry vinegar—yet, by her exquisite tact and cultivated grace, which is often better than talent in a woman, succeeded in gathering around her once a week all the notable people in Paris. As Lady de Bougainville stood in the midst of the assemblage, with César at her side, I could imagine that mother and son were a good sight to behold, both by one another and by the brilliant throng around them.

"Still, we ought to go home," she whispered to him, more than once, even while giving herself up, half Frenchwoman as she was, to the enjoyment of the minute, allowing herself to rest, gay and at ease, on the summit of one of

those sunshiny waves which are forever rising and falling in most human lives. "I should like to return even sooner than we promised, in case papa might be a little dull. He told me that he was to be quite alone at home to-night."

"Indeed!" said César, dryly. "I thought I overheard him giving orders about a little supper that was to be prepared for some visitor he expected. But," added the lad, with meaning, "papa often—*forgets*."

"César!" said Lady de Bougainville, sharply; and then, almost with a kind of entreaty, "Do not be hard upon your father."

The mother and son came home at once, though it was half an hour before they were expected and, apparently, wanted. For there, sitting opposite to Sir Edward, playing dominos with him, and amusing him till he burst into shouts of laughter, which were faintly echoed by Adrienne—who hung about the two, looking as happy and delighted as she had used to do of evenings at Wren's Nest—was the object of Josephine's long dislike and dread—Mr. Summerhayes.

There are women, justifiably the aversion of their husbands' male friends, rigidly righteous, and putting virtue forward in such an obnoxious manner that vice seems less unpleasant by comparison. These I do not uphold. But I do uphold a woman who dares to call wickedness by its right name, and shut her door upon it, however charming it may be; who, like David, "hates all evil-doers," and will not let them "continue in her sight." Poor King David—a sinner too! But if he sinned, he also repented. And, had he repented, I doubt not Lady de Bougainville would have been the first to hold out a kindly hand even to Mr. Summerhayes.

As it was, she made no pretense of the sort. She stood—her hand unextended, her eyes fixed on her husband's guest with a grave astonishment. So unmistakable was her manner, so strong her determination, that Summerhayes made no attempt to counteract either, but saying, "I perceive I am intruding here," bowed and departed.

His friend never attempted to detain him, but burst into bitter complaint when he was gone.

"Josephine, how can you be so unkind, so rude? You have driven away the only friend I have—the only fellow whose company is amusing to me, or whom I care to see in all Paris."

"Have you seen him often?"

"Why, yes—no; not so very often. And only at Galignani's. I never brought him here before to-night."

"Then, I entreat you, do not bring him again. You know what he is, and what I think of him. Into this house, and among my young sons and daughters, that man shall never come. Another time, when I happen to be absent, will you remember that, Edward?"

She spoke strongly—more strongly, perhaps,

than she should have spoken to their father in her children's presence; but it was necessary. Indecision might have been fatal. They were too old to be left in the dark as to their associates.

No one answered her. César, who had looked as vexed as she, took up a book and walked away to bed; but Adrienne followed her mother to her room, greatly agitated.

"Indeed, mamma, I had no idea Mr. Summerhayes was coming till he came. And I was so pleased to see him. I did not know you disliked him so much."

That was true, for she had said as little about him as possible to her young daughter; his delinquencies were of a kind not easy to open up to a girl, and of a man known to the family as their father's friend. Even now she hardly knew how to explain with safety the motives of her conduct.

"I do dislike him, Adrienne, and I have just cause, as I will tell you by-and-by, if necessary. At present let us put the matter aside. Mr. Summerhayes is not likely to come here again; papa says he shall not invite him."

But she knew none the less that she would have to take all imaginable precautions against the thing she dreaded—against the father, who was no sort of guard over his own children—who, when he liked or wished a thing, would stoop to any underhand means of accomplishing it. For, as she afterward discovered, her husband had all along kept up a desultory correspondence with Mr. Summerhayes, whom, though not actually supplying with money—Sir Edward since his accession to wealth having grown extremely parsimonious—he had allowed to make use of him in various ways which flattered his vanity and his love of patronizing; and at last in one way which, when Josephine found it out, she opened her eyes in horrified astonishment.

"He marry Adrienne?" And when Sir Edward one day showed her, rather hesitatingly, a letter making formally that request, she tore it up in a fit of unrestrainable passion. "How dare he! Of course you refused him at once?"

"I—I did not quite like to do that. He is acquainted with all my affairs. Oh, Josephine, pray—pray be careful."

The old story! The strong, wicked man knowing his power over the weak one, and using it. At a glance Lady de Bougainville saw the whole thing.

"Coward!" she was near saying, and then her sudden blind fury died down: it was dangerous. She needed to keep her eyes open, her mind calm, and all her wits about her. In a new and utterly unexpected form the old misery had risen up again. Once more she had to protect her children, not only from Mr. Summerhayes, but from their own father.

"And when did you receive this letter, Edward?" she asked, not passionately now, and he was blunt to any thing else.

"A week ago. But I was afraid you might not approve: Adrienne is so young."

"Adrienne will have money. She would be a very convenient wife for Mr. Summerhayes."

"And Summerhayes has talent, and is of good family, and he has sown his wild oats, he tells me, long ago. He might suit her very well. You had better let him take her. It is not every one who would marry poor Adrienne. And all women ought to be married, you know."

"Ought they?"

"Come, come, I am glad to see you so reasonable. Who shall answer the letter, you or I?"

"I will."

"And you'll give the man a chance? You'll not make an enemy of him?"

"Has he ever spoken to the child? But no—Adrienne would have told me—she always tells her mother every thing." And the comfort which always came with the thought of her children soothed the mother's half-maddened spirit. "If he has held his tongue, I—I will forgive him. But he must never see my daughter's face again."

And to this effect she wrote, her husband looking over her shoulder the while.

"Don't offend him, please don't offend him," was all Sir Edward said. When his wife looked as she looked now, he was so utterly cowed that he never risked any open opposition.

Whether to tell Adrienne what had happened, and how her parents, knowing what Mr. Summerhayes was, had decided for her at once, and so put her on her guard against him, or else by complete silence avoid the risk of awakening in the impressible heart of seventeen a tender interest for a possibly ill-used and merely unfortunate man: this was the question which the mother argued within herself twenty times a day. At length she left it for circumstances to decide, and simply kept watch—incessant watch.

Mr. Summerhayes played his cards well. He did not attempt to come to the house again; he made no open demonstrations of any kind, but he followed Adrienne at a distance with that silent, sedulous worship which even so innocent a creature could hardly help perceiving. By using the name and influence of Sir Edward, he got the *entrée* into several houses where the De Bougainvilles visited, and there, though he never addressed her, he watched Adrienne ceaselessly, with his melancholy, poetical eyes. True, he was forty, and she seventeen; but these ages are sometimes mutually attractive, and as a child she had been very fond of Mr. Summerhayes. Often, her mother recollects, he had taken her on his knee and called her his little wife. Many a true word is spoken in jest. Now that the years had dwindled down between them—leaving him still attractive, still youthful-looking—for people with neither hearts nor consciences are sometimes very slow in growing old—did Adrienne remember all this?

She was so quiet, so exceedingly quiet, that her mother had no means of guessing at her feelings. Since she learned that he was dis-

liked, Adrienne had never uttered Mr. Summerhayes's name. When they met him in society, they passed him with a mere bow of recognition, for Lady de Bougainville did not wish to go proclaiming him as a black sheep to every body, and desired, above all, to avoid every appearance of injustice or malice toward him: only she guarded with ceaseless care her own lamb from every advance of the smiling wolf. Who gradually conducted himself so little like a wolf, and so like an ordinary man of society, that her fears died down, and she began to hope that after all they had been exaggerated.

Until one day, when the climax came.

The man must have been mad or blind—blind with self-esteem, or maddened by the desperation of his circumstances, before he did such a thing; but one Sunday morning he sent to Miss de Bougainville a bouquet and a letter. Not an actual offer of marriage, but something so very near it, that the simplest maiden of seventeen could be under no mistake as to what he meant. Only, like many a man of the world, he a little overshot his mark by calculating too much upon this simplicity; for Adrienne, trembling, confused, hardly knowing what she did, but yet impelled by her tender conscience and her habit of perfect candor, came at once and put the letter in her mother's hands.

Lady de Bougainville read it through twice before she spoke. It was a clever letter, very clever; one of those which Mr. Summerhayes was particularly apt at writing. It put forward his devotion in the most humble, the most disinterested light; it claimed for his love the paternal sanction; and, in the only thing wherein he transgressed the bounds of decorum, namely in asking her to meet him in the quiet galleries of the Louvre, that Sunday forenoon—he put himself under the shelter of her father, who had promised him, he said, to bring her there.

Twice, as I said, in wrath that was utterly dumb, Josephine read this letter, and then, looking up, she caught sight of Adrienne's burning face, agitated by a new and altogether incomprehensible emotion.

"My child," she cried; "oh, my poor child!"

To say that she would rather have seen Adrienne in her grave than married to Mr. Summerhayes, is a form of phrase which many foolish parents have used and lived to repent of. Lady de Bougainville was too wise to use it at all, or to neutralize by any extravagance of expression a truth which seemed to her clear as daylight—would be clear even to the poor child herself, if only it were put before her.

"Adrienne," she said, sorrowfully, "I am glad you showed me this letter. It is, as you may see, equivalent to an offer of marriage, which you will refuse like the rest, I hope. You do really care for Mr. Summerhayes?"

Adrienne hung her head. "I have known him all my life; and—he likes me so."

"But he is a bad man; a worse man than you know or have any idea of."

"He has been; but he tells me, you see, that I should make him better."

The old delusion! Unfortunate child!

Adrienne's mother had now no alternative. Terrible as it was to open her young daughter's eyes, the thing must be done. Better a sharp pain and over; better any present anguish than years of life-long misery.

For, even granting there was one grain of truth under the man's false words, Josephine scouted altogether the theory of doing evil that good may come. In the goodness of a man who is only kept good by means of a gratified passion, she altogether disbelieved. Strong as the love of woman is to guide an erring man, to settle and control a vacillating one, over a thoroughly vicious one it has almost no effect, or an effect so passing that the light flickers into only blacker night. And here—could there be any light at all?

It was a case—almost the only one possible—in which the mother has a right to stand between her child and ruin: to prevent her marrying a deliberate villain.

"Come to me, my darling," said she, tenderly; and drawing Adrienne to her lap, and sheltering her there almost as in the days when, long after babyhood, she would come and "cuddle up" to her mother like a baby—Lady de Bougainville explained, without any reserve, as from perfectly reliable sources she herself had learned it, what sort of life Mr. Summerhayes had led: dissolute, unprincipled, selfish, mean—only saved from the condign punishment that overtakes smaller scoundrels by the exceeding charm which still lingered about him, and would linger to the last; a handsome person, a brilliant intellect, and a frank fascination of manner, which made the very people he was swindling and cheating ready to be cheated over again for the mere pleasure of his society.

Such men exist—we all have known them; and those people who possess no very keen moral sense often keep up acquaintance with them for years; in an easy surface way which, they say, does no harm. But when it comes to nearer ties—marriage, for instance!—Mr. Summerhayes had once a mother, who was heard to say: "If Owen ever marries a wife, God help her!"

"And," said Lady de Bougainville to herself, "God and *her* mother shall save my poor child from ever being his wife, if possible."

Still she was very just. She allowed, candidly, that only till Adrienne was twenty-one did her authority extend. "After that, my daughter, you may marry any one you please—even Mr. Summerhayes. But until then I will prevent you, even as I would prevent you from falling into the fire blindfold if I knew it. Do you understand? Have I wounded you very sore, my darling?"

Adrienne made no reply. She lay back with her head on Lady de Bougainville's shoul-

der, her face hidden from her. She neither sobbed nor wept, and offered not a single remonstrance or denial. At last, alarmed by her silence, Josephine lifted up the poor white face. It was blank: she had quietly fainted.

Lovers' agonies are sharp, and parents' cruelties many; but I think something might be said on the other side. And, as any thing suffered for another is, in one sense, ten times harder than any thing one suffers for one's self, it seems to me that the keenest of lovers' pain, the hottest of lovers' indignation, could hardly be worse than the mingled grief and anger of that poor mother, as she clasped her broken lily to her breast, and hated, with a hatred as passionate as it was righteous, the man who had brought such misery upon her little Adrienne.

As for Adrienne's father— But it was useless to go to him, to ask him questions, or exact from him any promises. Nothing he said or did could be in the smallest degree relied upon. She must take the matter into her own hands, and without delay.

It was Sunday morning, and the streets were lying in that temporary quiescence, when religious Paris is gone to High Mass and irreligious Paris idling away its hours in early *deshabille*, previous to blossoming out in *bourgeois* splendor and gayety. The Louvre would be, as Mr. Summerhayes had probably calculated, nearly empty; an excellent trysting-place for lovers, or for mortal foes—for her enemy, from first to last, this Owen Summerhayes had been. That he hated her too, Josephine had little doubt; for she knew only too much of his career. But face him she would at once, before he could do her any more harm.

Leaving Adrienne in Bridget's charge— Bridget, who was only too quick to detect how matters stood, and might be trusted without one word too many—Lady de Bougainville, at the appointed hour, went to meet her daughter's lover.

Sir Edward was not with him; but Mr. Summerhayes had already come, and was pacing up and down the empty *salon*, inspecting the pictures more with the cool eye of a connoisseur than the reckless impatience of an expectant lover. In a moment, the quick womanly eye detected this fact, and in the indignant womanly heart the last drop of pity or sympathy was dried up for Mr. Summerhayes.

At sound of footsteps he turned round, with a well-prepared and charming smile, and perceived Lady de Bougainville. It could not have been a pleasant meeting to him, man of the world as he was, and accustomed, no doubt, to a good many unpleasant things; but externally it was civil enough. He bowed, she bowed, and then they stood facing one another.

They were nearly of an age, and they had personally almost equal advantages. Mentally, too; except that probably the man had more brain than the woman, Lady de Bougainville

possessing good common-sense and general refinement rather than intellect. In courage they were both on a par; and they knew it. The long warfare that had been waged between them, a sort of permanent fight over that poor weak soul, who was scarcely worth fighting for, had taught them their mutual strength and their mutual antipathy. Now the final contest was at hand.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Lady de Bougainville; I had no idea of meeting you here."

"No, you intended to meet my daughter; but instead, I thought I would come myself. There is nothing you can have to say to her which you can not equally well say to her mother."

"Not exactly," returned Mr. Summerhayes. "To be plain with you, as I see you mean to be with me, my dear lady, you dislike me, and—I hope your daughter does not."

The smile on his lips made Josephine furious. As I have often said, she was not naturally a mild-tempered woman. It often cost her a great effort to restrain herself, as now.

"May I ask, Mr. Summerhayes, what grounds you have for supposing that Miss de Bougainville does not dislike you, or has the smallest feeling for you which could warrant your addressing to her such a letter as you sent her this morning?"

"You intercepted it, then?"

"No, she gave it to me. She brought it to me at once, as she will bring every letter you may choose to send her. My daughter and I have always been on terms of entire confidence."

"Oh, indeed! A most happy state of things!"

Nevertheless Mr. Summerhayes looked a little disconcerted. Apparently his experience of women had been of a different nature, and had not extended to these bread-and-butter Misses, whose extraordinary candor and trust in their mothers produce such inconvenient results. But he was not easily nonplussed; and in the present instance his necessities were desperate, and admitted of no means being left untried to attain his end. He advanced toward his adversary with a frank and pleasant air.

"Mrs. Scanlon—I beg pardon, Lady de Bougainville, but we can not readily forget, nor do I wish to forget, old times—you do not like me, I know, but you might at least be just to me. You must perceive that I love your daughter."

"Love!" she echoed, contemptuously.

"Well, I wish to marry her—let us put it so, without discussing the rest. She was fond of me as a child, and I dare say she would be now. The difference of age between us is not so enormous. By-the-by, is it that you object to?"

"No."

"Then what is it? My family? It is as good as her own. My fortune? That is small, certainly; but she is not poor. Myself person-



LADY DE BOUGAINVILLE AND ADRIENNE'S LOVER.

ally? Well, such as I am you have known me these fifteen years, and whether you approve of me or not, your husband does. Let me remind you, Lady de Bougainville, that it is the father, not the mother, who disposes of a daughter's hand."

He was very cunning, this clever man; he knew exactly where to plant his arrows and lay his pitfalls; but for once a straightforward woman was more than a match for him.

"Adrienne can not legally marry without her father's consent; but morally even his consent would not satisfy her without mine. And mine I never will give. You could not expect it."

"Why not? It is an odd thing for a gentleman to have to ask, but no one likes to be condemned unheard. May I inquire, Lady de Bougainville, why I am so very objectionable as a son-in-law?"

His daring was greater than she had anticipated, but somehow it only roused her own. The hackneyed simile of the lioness about to be robbed of her whelps was not inappropriate to Josephine's state of mind now. Every nerve was quivering, every feature tense with excitement. Her very fingers tingled with a fran-

tic desire to seize the man by the throat and shake the life out of him.

Despite his critical position, Mr. Summerhayes must have found her sufficiently interesting as an artistic study to note down and remember; for, the year afterward, he exhibited in the Royal Academy a "Slaughter of the Innocents," in which the face of the half-mad mother was not unlike Lady de Bougainville.

This cold, critical eye of his brought her to her senses at once.

"I will not have you for my son-in-law," she said, in a slow, measured tone, "for a good many reasons, none of which you will much like to hear. But you shall hear them if you choose."

"Proceed; I am listening."

"First, you do not love my child; it is her money only you want. She is plain and not clever, not attractive in any way, only good; how could a man like you be supposed to love her? It is a thing incredible."

"Granted. Then take the other supposition, that I wish to marry her because she loves me."

"If she were so unfortunate as to do so,

still she had better die than marry you. I say this deliberately, knowing what you are, and you know that I know it too."

"I am neither better nor worse than my neighbors," said he, carelessly. "But come, pray inform me as to my own character. It may be useful information in case I should ever have the honor to call you mother-in-law."

Josephine went close up to his ear, almost whispering her words; nevertheless, she said them distinct and sharp as sword-cuts—the righteous sword which few women, and fewer men, ever dare to use. Perhaps the world would be better and purer if they did dare.

"You are a thief, because you cheat poor tradesmen by obtaining luxuries you can not pay for; a swindler, because you borrow money from your friends on false pretenses, and never return it; a liar, because you twist the truth in any way to obtain your ends. These are social offenses. As for your moral ones"—Josephine stopped, and blushed all over her matron face of forty years—but still she went on unshrinking. "Do you think I have not heard of poor Betsy Dale at the farm, and of Mrs. Hewson, your landlord's wife? And yet you dare to enter my doors and ask for *your* wife my innocent daughter! Shame upon you—seducer—adulterer!"

Bold man as he was, Mr. Summerhayes did look ashamed for a minute or so, but quickly recovered himself.

"This is strong language, somewhat unexpected from the lips of a lady; but I suppose necessary to be endured. In such a position what can a poor man do? I must let you have your own way—as I noticed in old times you generally had, Lady de Bougainville. Poor Sir Edward!"

The sneer, which she bore in silence, did not, however, prove sufficient safety-valve for his suppressed wrath, which was certainly not unnatural. He turned upon her in scarcely concealed fierceness.

"Still, may I ask, madam, what right you have thus to preach to me? Are you yourself so sublime in virtue, so superior to all human weaknesses, that you can afford to condemn the rest of the world?"

His words smote Josephine with a sudden humility, for she felt she had spoken strongly—more so, perhaps, than a woman ought to speak. Besides, she had grown much humbler in many ways than she used to be.

"God knows," she said, "I am but too well aware of my short-comings. But whatever I may be does not affect what you are. Nor does it alter the abstract right and wrong of the case, and no pity for you—I have been sorry for you sometimes—can blind my eyes to it. I must 'preach,' as you call it; I must testify against the wickedness of men like you so long as I am alive."

"Then you will be a—a rather courageous personage. In fact, a lady more instructive

than agreeable. But let us come to the point," added he, casting off the faint gloss of politeness in which he had veiled his manner, and turning upon her a countenance which showed him a man fierce, unscrupulous, dangerous—controlled by nothing except the two grand restraints of self-interest and fear. "Lady de Bougainville, you know me and I know you. I also know your husband—perhaps a little too well; or he may have cause to think so. It is convenient for me to become his son-in-law, and to him to have me as such; for, in the tender relations which would then exist between us, I should hold my tongue. Otherwise I shall not feel myself bound to do so. Therefore, you and I, I think, had better be friends than enemies."

It was possibly an empty threat—his last weapon in a losing fight. But in her uncertainty of the extent of his relations with her husband, in her total insecurity as to facts, Josephine felt startled for a moment. Only for a moment. If ever a woman lived in whom no compromise with evil was possible, it was Josephine de Bougainville. Sir Edward used to say, in old jocular days, that if his wife were to meet the devil in person she might scorn him, or pity him, but she would certainly never be afraid of him. No more than she was now afraid of Mr. Summerhayes.

"You think to frighten me," she said, steadily; "but that is quite useless. I have already suffered as much as I can suffer. Do as you will—and I dare you to do it. I believe that even in this world the right is always the strongest. You shall not marry my daughter! She has been taught to love the right and hate the wrong. She will never love you. If you urge her, or annoy her in any way, I will set the police after you."

"You dare not."

"There is nothing I dare not do if it is to save my child."

"And I suppose, to save your child, you will go blackening me all over the world, crying out from the house-tops what a villain is Owen Summerhayes."

"No, that is not my affair. I do not attack you; I only resist you. If I saw a tiger roaming about the forest, I should not interfere with it; it may live its life, as tigers do. But if I saw it about to spring upon my child, or any other woman's child, I would take my pistol and shoot it dead."

"As I verily believe you would shoot me," muttered Owen Summerhayes.

He looked at her—she looked at him. It was in truth a battle hand to hand. Whether any relic of conscience made the man fearful, as an altogether clean conscience made the woman brave, I can not tell; but Mr. Summerhayes was silent. They stood just under one of those heavenly Madonnas of some old master—I know not which; but they are all heavenly. Is it not always a bit of heaven upon earth, the sight of a mother and child? Per-

haps, vile as he was, Summerhayes remembered his mother; or some first love whom in his pure, early days he might have made the happy mother of his lawful child; possibly the angel which, they say, never quite leaves the wickedest heart stirred in his—for he said respectfully, nay, almost humbly, “Lady de Bougainville, what do you wish me to do?”

She never hesitated a moment. Pity for him was ruin to the rest.

“I wish you to quit Paris immediately, and never attempt to see my daughter more.”

“And if I dissent from this—”

Josephine paused, weighing well her words—she had learned to be very prudent now. “I make no threats,” she said; “I shall not speak, but act. My daughter is not yet eighteen; until twenty-one she is in my power. I shall watch her night and day. Any letter you write I shall intercept; but there is no need of that, she will give it to me at once. If you attempt an interview with her, I shall give you into the hands of the police. Besides this, no moral persuasion, no maternal influence, that I am possessed of, shall be spared to show you to her in your true colors, till she hates you—no, not you, but your sins—as I do now.”

“You can hate, then?” And this clever man for a moment seemed to forget himself and his injuries in watching her; just as a curious intellectual study, no more.

“Yes, I can hate; Christian as I am, or am trying to be. God can hate too.”

He laughed out loud. “I do not believe in a God—do you? In your husband’s God, for instance, who, as Burns neatly informs Him,

“Sends me to heaven and ten to hell,
A’ for Thy glory,
And no for onie guid or ill,
They’ve done afore Thee.”

Josephine answered the profanity of the man by dead silence. The great struggle of her inward life now, the effort to tear from Heaven’s truth its swaddling-clothes of human lies, was too sacred to be laid bare in the smallest degree before Owen Summerhayes.

“We have drifted away from our subject of conversation,” she said, at last; “indeed it has almost come to an end. You know my intentions—and me.”

“I believe I have that honor; more honor than pleasure,” he answered, with a satirical bow.

“You ought also to know, though I name it as a secondary fact, that it is upon me, and me alone, that my children are dependent; that I have power to make a will, and leave, or not leave, as I choose, every half-penny of my fortune.”

“Indeed,” said Mr. Summerhayes, a little startled.

Lady de Bougainville smiled. “After this, in bidding you adieu, I have not the slightest fear but that our farewell will be a permanent one.”

He bowed again, rather absently, and then

his eyes, wandering round the room, lighted on two ladies watching him.

“Excuse me, but I see a friend; I have so many friends in Paris. Really it is quite *l’embarras de richesse*. May I take my leave of you, Lady de Bougainville?”

Thus they parted; so hastily that she hardly believed he was gone, till she saw him walking round the next *salon* pointing out pictures to the two French ladies, one of whom, it was evident, admired the handsome Englishman extremely. As I question not, Mr. Summerhayes found many persons, both men and women, to admire him to the end of his days.

But that is neither here nor there. I have nothing to do with him, his course of life, or the circumstances of his latter end. Personally, he crossed no more, either for good or ill, the path of Lady de Bougainville.

When she had parted from him, she turned to walk homeward down the long cool galleries, now gradually filling with their usual Sunday stream of Parisian *bourgeoisie*, chattering merrily with one another, or occasionally stopping to stare with ignorant but well-pleased eyes at the Murillos, Titians, Raffaelles, which cover these Louvre walls. Josephine let it pass her by—the cheerful crowd, taking its innocent pleasure, “though,” as some one said of a lark singing—“though it was Sunday.” Then, creeping toward the darkest and quietest seat she could find, she sank there utterly exhausted. Her strength had suddenly collapsed, but it was no matter. The battle was done—and won.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As I have said, the battle was ended: but there followed the usual results of victory—of ever so great a victory—picking up the wounded and burying the slain.

Lady de Bougainville had only too much of this melancholy work on hand for some days following her interview with Mr. Summerhayes. A few hours after her fainting-fit, Adrienne rose from bed, and appeared in the household circle just as usual; but for weeks her white face was whiter, and her manner more listless than ever. This love-fancy, begun in the merest childhood, had taken deeper root in her heart than even her mother was aware; and the tearing of it up tore some of the life away with it.

She never blamed any one. “Mamma, you were quite right,” she said, the only time the matter was referred to, and then she implored it might never be spoken of again. “Mamma, dearest! I could not have married such a man; I shall not even love him—not for very long. Pray be quite content about me.”

But for all that, poor Adrienne grew weak and languid; and the slender hold she ever had on life seemed to slacken day by day. She was always patient, always sweet; but she took very little interest in any thing.

For Sir Edward, he seemed to have forgotten all about Mr. Summerhayes, and the whole affair of his daughter's projected marriage. He became entirely absorbed in his own feelings and sensations, imagining himself a victim to one ailment after another, till his wife never knew whether to smile or to feel serious anxiety. And that insidious disease which he really had—at least I think he must have had, though nobody gave it a name—was beginning to show itself in lapses of memory so painful, and so evidently involuntary, that no one ever laughed at them now, or said, with sarcastic emphasis, "Papa forgets." Then, too, he had fits of irritability so extreme, mingled with corresponding depression and remorse, that even his wife did not know what to do with him. Nobody else ever attempted to do any thing with him. He was thrown entirely upon her charge, and clung to her with a helpless dependence, engrossing her whole time and thoughts, and being jealous of her paying the slightest attention to any other than himself, even her own children. By this time they had quitted Paris, which he insisted upon doing, and settled temporarily in London: where, between him and Adrienne, who, in his weakness though not in his selfishness, so pathetically resembled her father, the wife and mother was completely absorbed—made into a perfect slave.

This annoyed extremely her son César, whose bright healthy youth had little pity for morbid fancies; and who, when he was told of the Summerhayes affair, considered his mother had done quite right, and was furious at the thought of his favorite sister wasting one sigh over "that old humbug." "I'll tell you what, mother—find Adrienne something to do. Depend upon it, nothing keeps people straight like having plenty to do. Let us buy Brierley Hall, and then we will set to work and pull it down and build it up again. Fine amusement that will be—grand occupation for both papa and Adrienne."

Lady de Bougainville laughed at her son's rude boyish way of settling matters, but allowed that there was some common-sense in the plan he suggested. Only it annihilated, perhaps forever, her own dreams about Oldham Court.

"Oh, never mind that," reasoned the light-hearted young fellow: "you shall go back again some day. There are so many of us, some will be sure to want Oldham Court to live at; or you can have it yourself as a dower-house. It is securely ours; we can not get rid of it; Mr. Langhorne tells me it is entailed on the family. Unless, indeed, you should happen to outlive us all, your six children, and—say sixty grandchildren, when you can sell it if you choose, and do what you like with the money."

Laughing at such a ridiculous possibility, Lady de Bougainville patted her son's head, told him he was a great goose, but nevertheless yielded to his reasoning.

In this scheme, when formally consulted—of

which formality he was now more tenacious than ever—Sir Edward also condescended to agree; and Adrienne, when told of it, broke into a faint smile at the thought of changing this dreary hotel life for a real country home once more—a beautiful old house with a park and a lake, and a wood full of primroses and violets: for Adrienne was a thorough country girl, who would never be made into a town lady.

So Brierley Hall was bought, and the restorations begun, greatly to the interest of everybody, including the invalids, who brightened up day by day. A furnished house was taken in Brierley village, and thither the whole family removed: to be on the spot, they said, so as to watch the progress of their new house, the rebuilding of which, César declared, was as exciting as the re-establishment of an empire. True, this had not been done on the grand scale which his youthful ambition planned, for his wiser mother preferred leaving the fine old exterior walls intact, and only remodeling the interior of the mansion. But still it was an entirely new home, and in a new neighborhood, where not a soul knew any thing of them, nor did they know a single soul.

This fact had its advantages, as Josephine, half pleasurably, half painfully, recognized. It was a relief to her to dwell among strangers, and in places to which was attached not one sad memory—like that spot which some old poet sings of, where

"No sod in all the island green,
Has opened for a grave."

"This is capital!" César would say, when he and his mother took their confidential stroll under the great elm avenue, or down the ivy walk, after having spent hours in watching the proceedings of masons and carpenters, painters and paper-hangers. "I think rebuilding a house is as grand as founding a family—which I mean to do."

"Re-found it, as we are doing here," corrected the mother with a smile, for her son was growing out of her own conservative principles; he belonged to the new generation, and delighted in every thing modern and fresh. They often had sharp, merry battles together, in which she sometimes succumbed; as many a strong-minded mother will do to an eldest and favorite son, and rather enjoy her defeat.

César was very much at home this year, both because it was an interregnum between his college life and his choice of a profession, which still hung doubtful, and because his mother was glad to have him about her, supplying the need tacitly felt of "a man in the house"—instead of a fidgety and vacillating hypochondriac. No one gave this name to Sir Edward, but all his family understood the facts of the case, and acted upon them. It was impossible to do otherwise. He was quite incapable of governing, and therefore was silently and respectfully deposed.

Nevertheless, by the strong influence of his ever-watchful guardian, his wife, the sacred veil of sickness was gradually dropped over all his imperfections; and though he was little consulted or allowed to be troubled with any thing, his comfort was made the first law of the household, and every thing done for the amusement and gratification of "poor papa." With which arrangement papa was quite satisfied; and, though he never did any thing, doubtless considered himself as the central sun of the whole establishment: that is, if he ever thought about it at all, or about any thing beyond himself. It was as difficult to draw the line where his selfishness ended and his real incapacity began, as it is in some men to decide what is madness and what actual badness. Some psychologists have started the comfortable but rather dangerous theory, that all badness must be madness. God knows! Meantime, may He keep us all, or one day make us, sane and sound!

This condition of the nominal head of the household was a certain drawback when the neighbors began to call; and, as was natural, all the county opened its arms to Sir Edward and Lady de Bougainville and their charming family. For charming they were at once pronounced to be, and with reason. Though little was known of them beyond the obvious facts of a title, a fortune, and the tales whispered about by their servants of how they had just come from Paris, where they had mingled in aristocratic and even royal circles, still this was enough. And the sight of them, at church, and elsewhere, confirmed every favorable impression. They were soon invited out in all directions, and courted to an extent that even Sir Edward might have been content with, in the neighborhood which they had selected as their future home.

But, strange to say, Sir Edward's thirst for society had now entirely ceased. He considered it an intolerable bore to be asked out to dinner; and when he did go, generally sat silent, or made himself as disagreeable as he had once been agreeable in company. The simple law of good-manners—that a man may stay at home if he chooses, but if he does go out, he ought to make himself as pleasant as he can—was not recognized by poor Sir Edward. Nor would he have guests at his own house; it was too troublesome, he said, and he was sure nobody ever came to see him, but only to see the young people and their mother. He was not going to put himself out in order to entertain their visitors. So it came to pass, that in this large establishment the family were soon afraid even of asking an accidental friend to dinner.

But over these and other vagaries of her master, which old Bridget used to tell me of, let me keep silence—the tender silence which Lady de Bougainville scrupulously kept whenever she referred to this period of her life, externally so rich, so prosperous, so happy. And,

I believe, looked back upon from the distance of years, she herself felt it to have been so.

I think the same. I do not wish her to be pitiéd overmuch, as if her life had been one long tragedy; for that was not true; no lives are. They are generally a mixture of tragedy and comedy, ups and downs, risings and fallings as upon sea-waves, or else a brief space of sailing with the current over smooth sunshiny waters, as just now this family were sailing. A gay, happy young family; for even Adrienne began to lift up her head like a snow-drop after frost, and go now and then to a dance or an archery meeting; while at the same time she was steadily constant to the occupations she liked best—walking, basket-laden, to the cottages about Brierley, wherever there was any body sick, or poor, or old; teaching in the Sunday-school; and being on the friendliest terms with every child in the parish. Some of these, become grown-up fathers and mothers, had cherished, I found, such a tender recollection of her—her mild, pale face, and her sweet ways—that there are now in Brierley several little girls called "Addy," or "Adorine," which was their parents' corruption of the quaint foreign name after which they had been christened, the name of Miss de Bougainville.

Looking at her, her mother gradually became content. There are worse things than an unfortunate love—a miserable marriage, for instance. And with plenty of money, plenty of time, and a moderate amount of health (not much, alas! for Adrienne's winter cough always returned), an unmarried woman can fill up many a small blank in others' lives, and, when she dies, leave a wide blank for that hitherto unnoticed life of her own.

They must, on the whole, have led a merry existence, and been a goodly sight to see, those young De Bougainvilles, during the two years that Sir Edward was restoring Brierley Hall. When they walked into church, filling the musty old pew with a perfect gush of youth and bloom, hearty boyhood and beautiful girlhood; or when in a battalion, half horse, half foot, they attended archery parties, and cricket meetings, and picnics, creating quite a sensation, and reviving all the gayety of the county—their mother must have been exceedingly proud of them.

"Only three of us at a time, please," she would answer, in amused deprecation, to the heaps of invitations which came for dinners, and dances, and what not. "We shall overrun you like the Goths and Vandals, we are so many."

"We are so many!" Ah! poor fond mother, planning room after room in her large house, and sometimes fearing that Brierley Hall itself would not be big enough to contain her children. "So many!" Well, they are again the same number now.

By the time the Hall was finished, the De Bougainvilles had fairly established their position as one of the most attractive and popular

families in the neighborhood. The young people were pronounced delightful; the mother in her beautiful middle-age was almost as young as any of them, always ready to share in and advance the amusements of her children, and keep them from feeling their father's condition as any cloud upon themselves. She stood a constant and safe barrier between him and them;—a steady wall; with sunshine on the one side and shade on the other, but which never betrayed the mystery of either. Many a time, after a sleepless night or a weary day, she would quit her husband for an hour or two, and come down among her children with the brightest face possible, ready to hear of all their pleasures, share in their interests, and be courteous and cordial to their new friends; who, young and old, were loud in admiration of Lady de Bougainville. Also, so well did she maintain his dignity, and shield his peculiarities by wise excuses, that every body was exceedingly civil, and even sympathetic, to Sir Edward. He might have enjoyed his once favorite amusement of dining out every day, had he chosen; but he seldom did choose, and shut himself up from society almost entirely.

At length the long-deserted mansion was an inhabited house once more. Light, merry feet ran up and down the noble staircase; voices, singing and calling, were heard in and out of the Hall; and every evening there was laughter, and chatter, and music without end in the tapestry room, which the young De Bougainvilles preferred to any other. It was "so funny," they said; and when a house-warming was proposed, a grand ball, to requite the innumerable hospitalities the family had received since they came to the neighborhood, César, and Louis too—so far as Louis condescended to such mundane things; being a student and a youth of poetical mind—insisted that the dancing should take place there.

"It would be grand," said they, "to see these ghostly gentlemen and ladies looking down upon us flesh and blood creatures, so full of fun, and enjoying life so much. Mamma, you must manage it for us. You can persuade papa to any thing—persuade him to let us have a ball."

She promised, but doubtfully, and the question long hung in the balance, until some accidental caller happened to suggest to Sir Edward that with his rank and fortune he ought to take the lead in society, and give entertainments that would outshine the whole county. So one day he turned suddenly round, not only gave his consent to the ball, but desired that it might be given in the greatest splendor, and with no sparing of expense, so that the house-warming at Brierley Hall might be talked of for years in the neighborhood. It was.

"Now, really, papa has been very good in this matter," said César, rather remorsefully, to his sister, as they stood watching him creep from room to room, leaning on his wife's arm, and taking a momentary pleasure in the inspec-

tion of the preparations in ball-room and supper-room. The young folks had now grown so used to their father's self-engrossed valetudinarianism that they took little notice of him, except to pay him all respect when he did appear among them, and get out of his way as soon as they could. As ever, he was the "wet blanket" upon all their gayety—the cloud in their sunshiny young lives. But now he could not help this; once he could.

It was astonishing how little these young people saw of their father, especially after he came to Brierley Hall. He had his own apartments, in which he spent most of his time, rarely joining the family circle except at meals. His children's company he never sought; they knew scarcely any thing of him and his ways, and their mother was satisfied that it should be so. The secrets of the life to which she had once voluntarily linked her own, and with which she had traveled on, easily or hardly, these many years, were known to her, and her alone. Best so. Though she was constantly with him, and her whole thought seemed to be to minister to his comforts and contribute to his amusement, it was curious how little she ever talked to her children about their father.

The day of the ball arrived. One or two persons yet living, relics of the families then belonging to the neighborhood, have told me of it, and how splendid it was—finer than any entertainment of the kind ever remembered about Brierley. Though it was winter time, and the snow lay thick upon the ground, people came to it for fifteen miles round—the grand people of the county. As for the poor people—Miss de Bougainville's poor—they were taken by herself beforehand to see the beautiful sight, the supper-room glittering with crystal and plate, and the decorated ball-room, which was really the tapestry room, both on account of César's wish, and because Sir Edward thought, as a small flight of stairs alone divided it from his bedroom, he would be able to go in and out and watch the dancers, retiring when he pleased. He had declined appearing at supper, which would be far too much trouble; but he was gratified by the handsome appearance of every thing, and in so bland a mood that he consented to his wife's desire that there should be next day a second dance in the servants' hall, where their humbler neighbors might enjoy the remnants of the feast. And as she arranged all this, Lady de Bougainville felt in her heart that it was good to be rich—good to have power in her hands, so as to be able to make her children and her friends happy—to spread for them a merry, hospitable feast, and yet have enough left to fill many a basket of fragments for the poor.

"When your father and I are gone," she said to César—after telling him what he was to do as the young host of the evening—"when we have slipped away and you reign here in our stead, don't ever forget the poor; we were poor ourselves once."

No one would have thought it who saw her now, moving about her large house, and governing it with a wise liberality. All her pettiness, pathetic economies had long ceased; she dressed well, kept her house well, and spared no reasonable luxury to either herself or her children. She took pleasure in this, the first large hospitality she had ever exercised—almost as much pleasure as her children; until, just at the last moment, a cloud was cast over their mirth by Sir Edward's taking offense at some trifle, becoming extremely irritable, and declaring he would not appear at night at all—they might manage things all themselves, and enjoy themselves without him, as they were in the habit of doing. And he shut himself, and his wife too, in his own room, whence she did not emerge till quite late in the day.

"It is very vexing, certainly," she owned to César, who was lying in wait for her as she came out; "but we must let him have his own way. Poor papa!"

And after her boy left her—for he was too angry to say much—Josephine stood for a minute at the window of the ante-room which divided her room from that of the girls, who were all dressing and laughing together. Once or twice she sighed, and looked out wistfully on the clear moonlight shining on the snow. Was she tired of this world, with all its vanities and vexations of spirit? Or was her soul, which had learned much of late, full only of pity, and a certain remorseful sorrow that there should be nothing else but pity left, for the man who had been her husband all these years? I know not; I can not sufficiently put myself in her place to comprehend what her feelings must have been. But whatever they were she kept them to herself, and went with a smiling face into her daughters' chambers.

There were two, one for the younger girls—a quaint apartment, hung with Chinese paper, covered over with quaint birds, and fishes, and flowers; and another, the cheerfulest in the house, where the fire-light shone upon crimson curtains and a pretty French bed, and left in shadow the grim worn face of John the Baptist over the fire-place; I know the room. There Bridget stood brushing the lovely curls of Miss Adrienne, for whom her mother had carefully chosen a ball-dress, enveloping her defective figure in clouds of white gauze, and putting tender blush roses—real sweet-scented hot-house roses—in her bosom and her hair; so that for once poor fragile Adrienne looked absolutely pretty. For the two others, Gabrielle and Catherine, they looked pretty in any thing. If I remember right Bridget told me they wore this night white muslin—the loveliest dress for any young girl—with red camellias in their bosoms, and I think ivy in their hair. Something real, I know it was, for their mother had a dislike to artificial flowers as ornaments.

She dressed, first her daughters and then herself; wearing her favorite black velvet, and looking the handsomest of them all. She walk-

ed round her beautiful rooms, glittering with wax-lights, and tried to put on a cheerful countenance.

"It is a great pity of course, papa's taking this fancy; but we must frame some excuse for him, and not fret about it. Let us make ourselves and every body about us as cheerful as we can."

"Yes, mamma," said Adrienne, whose slightly pensive but not unhappy face showed that, somehow or other, she too had already learned that lesson.

"Mamma," cried César and Louis together, "you are a wonderful woman!"

Whether wonderful or not, she was the woman that God made her and meant her to be; nor had she wasted the gifts, such as they were. When, in years long after, her children's fond tongues being silent, others ventured to praise her, this was the only thing to which Lady de Bougainville would ever own. "I did my best," she would answer—her sweet, dim old eyes growing dreamy, as if looking back calmly upon that long tract of time—"Yes, I believe I did my best."

Most country balls are much alike; so there is no need minutely to describe this one. Its most noticeable feature was the hostess and her children, who were, every body agreed—and the circumstance was remembered for years—"quite a picture;" so seldom was it that a lady, still young-looking enough to have passed for her eldest son's sister instead of his mother, should be surrounded by so goodly a family, descending, step by step, to the youngest child, with apparently not a single break or loss.

"You are a very fortunate and a very happy woman," said to her one of her neighbors, who had lost much—husband, child, and worldly wealth.

"Thank God, yes!" answered gently Lady de Bougainville.

Every body of course regretted Sir Edward's absence and his "indisposition," which was the reason assigned for it; though perhaps he was not so grievously missed as he would have liked to be. But every body seemed wishful to cheer the hostess by double attentions, and congratulations on the admirable way in which her son César supplied his father's place. And, after supper, the rector of Brierley, who was also the oldest inhabitant there, made a pretty little speech, giving the health of their absent host, and expressing the general satisfaction at Sir Edward's taking up his residence in the neighborhood, and the hope that the De Bougainvilles of Brierley Hall might become an important family in the county for many generations.

After supper the young folks began dancing again, and the old folks looked on, sitting round the room or standing in the doorway. Lady de Bougainville looked on too, glancing sometimes from the brilliantly lighted crowd of moving figures to that other crowd of figures on the tapestried wall, so silent and shadowy.

How lifelike was the one—how phantom-like the other! Who would ever have thought they would one day have changed places: those all vanished, and these remained?

It was toward one o'clock in the morning that a thing happened which made this ball an event never forgotten in the neighborhood while the generation that was present at it survived. Not only Bridget, but several extraneous spectators, have described the scene to me as one of the most startling and painful that it was possible to witness.

The gaiety was at its climax: cheered by their good supper, the dancers were dancing and the musicians were playing their very best: all but a few guests, courteously waited for by César and Adrienne, had returned to the ball-room; and Lady de Bougainville, supplying her elder children's place, was moving brightly hither and thither, smiling pleasantly on the smiling crowd.

Suddenly a door was half opened—the door at the further end leading by a short staircase to Lady de Bougainville's bedchamber. Some of the dancers shut it; but in a minute more it was again stealthily set ajar, and a face peered out—a weird white face, with long black hair hanging from under a white tasseled night-cap. It was followed by a figure, thin and spare, wrapped in a white flannel dressing-gown. The unstockinged feet were thrust into slippers, and a cambric handkerchief strongly perfumed was flourished in the sickly-looking hands. Such an apparition, half sad, half ludicrous, was never before seen in a ball-room.

At first it was only perceived by those nearest the door, and they did not recognize it until somebody whispered "Sir Edward." "He's drunk, surely," was the next suggestion; and one or two gentlemen spoke to him and tried to lure him back out of the room.

No, he was not drunk; whatever his failings, intemperance had never been among them. It was something far worse, if worse be possible. The few who addressed him, and met in return the vacant stare of that wild wandering eye, saw at once that it was an eye out of which the light of reason had departed, either temporarily or forever.

The well-meant efforts to get him out of the room proved fruitless. He broke away with a look of terror from the hands which detained him, and began to dart in and out among the dancers like a hunted creature. Girls screamed—the quadrille was interrupted—the music stopped—and in the sudden lull of silence, Lady de Bougainville, standing talking at the further end of the room, heard a shrill voice calling her.

"Josephine! Josephine! Where is my wife? Somebody has taken away my wife!"

Whether she had in some dim way foreboded a similar catastrophe, and so when it came was partially prepared for it, or whether the vital necessity of the moment compelled her into almost miraculous self-control, I can not

tell; but the testimony of all who were present at that dreadful scene declares that Lady de Bougainville's conduct throughout it was something wonderful: even when, catching sight of her through the throng, the poor demented figure rushed up to her, and, as if flying there for refuge, clung with both arms about her neck.

"Josephine, save me! These people are hunting me down; I know they are. Dear wife, save me!"

She soothed him with quiet words, very quiet, though they came out of lips blanched dead-white. But she never lost her self-command for a moment. Taking no notice of any body else—and indeed the guests instinctively shrunk back, leaving her and him together—she tried to draw her husband out of the room; but he violently resisted. Not until she said imperatively, "Edward, you *must* come!" did he allow her to lead him, by slow degrees, through the ball-room, to the door by which he had entered it.

It was a piteous sight—a dreadful sight. There was not even the sublimity of madness about it: no noble mind overthrown, no

"Sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh."

Sir Edward's condition was that of mere fatuity—a weak soul sinking gradually into premature senility. And the way in which his wife, so far from being startled and paralyzed by it, seemed quite accustomed to his state, and understanding how to manage it, betrayed a secret more terrible still, which had never before been suspected by her guests and good neighbors. They all looked at one another, and then at her, with eyes of half-frightened compassion, but not one of them attempted to interfere.

She stood a minute—she, the tall, stately woman, with her diamonds flashing and her velvet gown trailing behind her, and that forlorn, tottering figure clinging to her arm—and, casting a look of mute appeal to those nearest her, whispered: "Don't alarm my children, please. Take no notice—let the dancing go on as before;" and was slipping out of sight with her husband, when Sir Edward suddenly stopped.

"Wait a minute, my dear," said he. A new whim seemed to strike him; he threw himself into an attitude, wrapping the folds of his dressing-gown about him something like a clergyman's gown, and flourishing his white pocket-handkerchief with an air of elegant ease quite ghastly to witness.

"Ladies and gentlemen—no, I mean my dear friends and brethren—you see my wife, a lady I am exceedingly proud of; she comes of very high family, and has been the best and kindest wife to me." The sentence was begun *ore rotundo*, in a strained, oratorical, pulpit tone, gradually dwindling down almost to a whine.

"She is very kind to me still," he resumed, but querulously and petulantly, like a complaining child. "Only she worries me sometimes;



WAITING ON THE STAIR.

she makes me eat my dinner when I don't want it; and, would you believe it?"—breaking into a silly kind of laugh—"she won't let me catch flies! Not that there are many flies left to catch—it is winter now. I saw the snow lying on the ground, and I am so cold. Wrap me up, *Josephine*; I am so very cold!"

Shivering, the poor creature clung to her once more, continuing his grumblings, which had dropped down to a mere mutter, quite unintelligible to those around. They shrank away still further, with a mixture of awe and pity, while his wife half drew, half carried him up the few stairs that led to his bedroom door. It closed upon the two; and from that hour until the day when they were invited to his funeral, none of his neighbors, nor indeed any one out of his own immediate family, ever saw any more of poor Sir Edward de Bougainville.

And they heard very little either. The Brierley doctor, whom some one had sent for, came immediately, was admitted just as a matter of form, reported that the patient was asleep, but really seemed to know little or nothing about his illness. Nor did the sick man's own children, to whom every body, of course, spoke

delicately and with caution during the brief interval that elapsed before the ball broke up and the guests dispersed. They were very kindly and considerate guests—would have done any thing in the world for their hostess and her family; but the case seemed one in which nobody could do any thing. So, after a while, the last carriage rolled away; César, left sole representative of the hospitality of the family, saw the visitors depart with due attention and many apologies, but as few explanations as could possibly be made. He was his mother's own son already, both for reticence and self-control.

When the house was quiet, he insisted upon all the servants and children going to bed; but he and Adrienne, who had at first terribly broken down, and afterward recovered herself, spent the remainder of the night—the chilly winter night—sitting on the little stair outside their parents' door.

Once or twice, the mother came out to them, and insisted on their retiring to rest.

"Papa is fast asleep still—he may sleep till morning—he often does. Indeed, I am quite used to this, it never alarms me. Don't vex your dear hearts about me, my children," she

added, breaking into a faint smile as she stooped over them and patted their hair. "You are too young for sorrow. It will come in God's own time to you all."

So said she, with a sigh; mourning over the possible chance of her children's lives being as hard as her own, nor knowing how vain was the lamentation. Still, her feeling on this point was so strong and immovable, that, say what they would, nothing could induce her to let either son or daughter share her forlorn watch; both then and afterward she firmly resisted all attempts of the kind. I fancy, besides the reason she gave, there were others equally strong—a pathetic kind of shame lest other eyes than her own should see the wreck her husband had become, and a wish to keep up to the last, above all before her children, some shadowy image of him in his best self, by which, and not by the reality, he might be remembered after he was gone.

The end, however, was by no means at hand, and she knew it, or at least had good reason for believing so. The most painful thing about Sir Edward's illness was that the weaker his mind became the stronger his body seemed to grow. Mr. Oldham's state had been pitiable enough, Josephine once thought, but here was the reasoning brain, not merely imprisoned, but slowly decaying within its bodily habitation, the mere physical qualities long outlasting—and God only knew how many years they might outlast—the mental ones; for Sir Edward was still in the middle of life. When she looked into futurity Josephine shivered; and horrible though the thought was to enter her mind, still it did enter, when he suffered very much—that the heart-disease of which Dr. Waters had warned her, and against which she had ever since been constantly on her guard, might after all be less a terror than a mercy.

He did suffer very much at times, poor Sir Edward! There were at intervals many fluctuations, in which he was pathetically conscious of his own state, and to what it tended; nay, even, in a dim way, of the burden he was, and was likely to become, to every body. And he had an exceeding fear of death and dying—a terror so great that he could not bear the words spoken in his presence. In his daily drives with his wife—often with the carriage-blinds down, for he could not endure the light, or the sight of chance people—nothing would induce him to pass Ditchley church-yard.

"It is very strange," Josephine would say to Bridget, who now, as ever, either knew or guessed more than any one her mistress's cares. "He is so afraid of dying; when I feel so tired!—so tired!—when I would so gladly lay me down to rest, if it were not for my children. I must try to live a little longer, if only for my children."

But yet, Bridget told me, she saw day by day Lady de Bougainville slowly altering under the weight of her anxieties, growing wasted, and old, and pale, with constant confinement

to the one room, out of which Sir Edward would scarcely let her stir by night or by day. Seldom did she get an hour's refreshing talk with her children, who were so entirely left to themselves in that large empty house, where of course no visitors were now possible. It would have been a dull house to them, with all its grandeur, had they not been, by all accounts, such remarkably bright young people, inheriting all the French liveliness and Irish versatility, based upon that solid ground-work of conscientiousness which their mother had implanted in them, implanted in her by the centuries' old motto of her race, "Fais ce que tu dois, advenire que pourra."

And so when that happened which she must have long foreseen, and Sir Edward fell into this state, she and they still did the best they could, and especially for one another. The children kept the house cheerful; the mother hid her heaviest cares within the boundary of that sad room. Oh, if rooms could tell their history, what a tale to be told there! And when she did cross its threshold, it was with a steadfast, smiling countenance, ready to share in any relaxation that her good children never failed to have ready for her. And she took care that all their studies and pursuits should go on just the same, at home and at college, except that César, who had no special call elsewhere, remained at Brierley Hall. She had said to him, one day, "I can't do without you; don't leave me;" and her son had answered, with his prompt decision, so like her own, "I never will."

But as the summer advanced, and she felt how dreary the young people's life was becoming, with that brave motherly heart of hers she determined to send some of them away, out of sight and hearing of her own monotonous and hopeless days. For she had no hope; the best physicians, who of course gave their best consideration to the case of so wealthy a man, and so important a member of society (alas, the mockery!) as Sir Edward de Bougainville, could give her none. Cure was impossible; but the slow decay might go on for many years. Nothing was left to her but endurance; the hardest possible lesson to Josephine de Bougainville. She could fight with fate, even yet; but to stand tamely with bound hands and feet, waiting for the advancing tide, like the poor condemned witches of old—it was a horrible trial. Yet this was her lot, and she must bear it. In hers, as in many another life, she needed to be taught by means least expected or desired; had to accept the blessings which she never sought, and lose those which she most prayed for; yet long before the end came, she could say—I have often heard her say—not "I have done my best," but "He has done His best with me, and I know it." And the *knowing* of it was the lesson learned.

But just now it was very hard; and she felt often, as she owned to Bridget, "tired—so tired!" as if all the happiness that existence

could offer would not be equivalent to the one blessing of mere rest.

I have said little about Bridget lately; indeed, these latter years she had retired into what was still called the nursery, as a sort of amateur young ladies' maid, occupying no very prominent position in the family. Her plain looks had grown plainer with age; Sir Edward disliked to see her about the house, and nothing but his wife's strong will and his own weak one could have retained in her place the follower of the family. In the sunshine of prosperity poor Bridget retired into the shade, but whenever a cloud came over the family, her warm Irish heart leaped up to comfort them all; her passionate Irish fidelity kept their secrets from every eye; and her large Irish generosity forgot any little neglect of the past, and flung itself with entire self-devotion into the present. (This little ebullition must be pardoned. I was very fond of Bridget, who stood to me as the type of all that is noble in the Irish character, which is very noble sometimes at its core.)

During this sad summer, Bridget rose to the emergencies of the time. She lightened her mistress's hands as much as possible, becoming a sort of housekeeper, and doing her duties very cleverly, even in so large an establishment as Brierley Hall. For there was no one else to do it; Adrienne was not able; it was as much as Bridget's caution could do to conceal from her mistress a care which would have added heavily to all her other burdens, namely, that things were not quite right with poor Miss Adrienne. Her winter cough lingered still. That gay ball-dress in which she had looked so pretty, proved a fatal splendor; during the long chilly night when she and César had sat at their mother's room door, the cold had pierced in through her bare neck and arms. She scarcely felt it; her mind was full of other things; and when, in the gray dawn, she took out of her bosom the dead hot-house roses gathered by her mother with such care, she little thought, nor did any one think, that underneath them Death himself had crept in and struck her to the heart.

Not a creature suspected this. That strange blindness which sometimes possesses a family which for many years has known neither sickness nor death, hung over them all—even the mother. She was so accustomed to Adrienne's delicacy of health, and to Bridget's invariable cheery comment upon it, "It's the cracked pitcher goes longest to the well," that her eyes detected no great change in the girl. And Adrienne herself said nothing; she was so used to feeling "a little ill," that she took her feebleness quite as a matter of course, and only wished to make it as little of a trouble as possible—above all to her mother, who had so many cares; and she urged with unselfish earnestness a plan Lady de Bougainville arranged, and at last brought about, that the three boys should go with an Oxford tutor on a reading-party to Switzerland for two months.

César resisted it a long time. "I will not leave you, mother. You said I never must."

"I know that, my son, and I want you very much, but I shall want you more by-and-by. This kind of life may last for forty years—years! I can bear it better when I see my children happy. Besides," added she, more lightly, "I could not trust your brothers without you—you grave old fellow! You are the strong-hold of the house. Nevertheless, you must do as your mother bids you a little while longer. Obey her now, my darling, and go."

So César went.

The morning of departure was sunshiny and bright, and the three lads were bright as the day. It was natural—they were so gay, and healthy, and young; their sisters too—to whom they promised heaps of things to be brought home from Switzerland. Adrienne was the only one who wept. She, clinging to César, always her favorite brother, implored him to "take care of himself," and be sure to come home at the two months' end.

"Ay, that I will! Nothing in the world shall stop me for a day," cried he, shaking his long curls—very long hair was the fashion then—and looking like a young fellow bound to conquer fate, and claim from fortune every thing he desired.

"Very well," said his mother, gayly. "Come back on the 1st of October and you'll find us all standing here, just as you leave us. Now be off! Good-by—good-by."

She forced the lads away, with the laugh on her lips and the tears in her eyes. Yet she was not sad—glad rather, to have driven her children safe out of the gloomy atmosphere which she herself had to dwell in, but which could not fail to injure them more or less.

"The young should be happy," she said, half sighing; "and, bless them! these boys will be very happy. What a carriageful of hope it is!"

She watched it drive away, amidst a grand farewell waving of hats and handkerchiefs, and then turned back with her three daughters into the shadows of the quiet house, gulping down a wild spasm at her throat, but still content—quite content. Women that are mothers will understand it all.

CHAPTER XIX.

In this straightforward telling of the history of my dear Lady de Bougainville, I pause, almost with apprehension. I am passing out of the sunshiny day, or the checkered lights and glooms which, viewed from a distance, seem like sunshine, into the dark night—as she had now to pass. The events next to be recorded happened so suddenly, and in such rapid succession, that in the recording of them they seem a mountain of grief too huge for fate to heap at once upon one individual. Yet is it

not true to the experience of daily life that sorrows mostly come "in battalions?"

Lady de Bougainville had had many perplexities, many trials, many sore afflictions; but one solemn Angel had always passed by her door without setting his foot there, or taking any treasures thence, except indeed her little new-born babies. Now, on that glorious August day, he stood behind her, hiding his bright still face with his black wings, on the very threshold of Brièrley Hall.

After the boys had departed, Bridget came to her mistress, and hastily, with fewer words than voluble Bridget was wont to use, asked if she might go up to London with the young ladies and their governess for some little pleasureing that had been planned.

"And I'm thinking, my lady, if afterward I might just take Miss Adrienne to see the doctor" (a physician of note who sometimes attended the family). "She's growing thin, and losing her appetite of late: fretting a little, maybe, at losing her brothers. But now they're fairly gone, she'll soon get over it."

"Of course she will," said the mother, smiling; for Bridget spoke so carelessly that even she was deceived. Doubly deceived next day by her daughter's red cheeks and sparkling eyes, caused by the excitement of this brief two-hours' journey.

"You don't look as if you needed any doctor, my child. However, you may go, just to satisfy Bridget. Mind and tell me all he says to you."

But when they came back there was nothing to tell; at least Adrienne reported so: "All the doctor's orders were given to Bridget in the next room; he only patted me on the shoulder, and bade me go home and get strong as fast as ever I could—which I mean to do, mamma; it would be such a trouble to you if I were ill. There's papa calling you! run back to him—quick—quick!"

It happened to be one of Sir Edward's bad days, and not till quite late at night had his faithful nurse—for he would have no other—a chance of leaving him and creeping down stairs for a little rest in the cedar parlor. There she found Bridget waiting for her, as was her frequent habit, with a cup of tea, after all the rest of the household was in bed.

"Thank you!" Josephine said, and no more—for she had no need to keep up a smiling face before her faithful old servant—and she was utterly worn out with the long strain of the day.

Bridget once told me that as she stood beside her mistress that night, and watched her take that cup of tea, she felt as if it were a cup of poison which she herself had poured out for her drinking.

"Now," continued Lady de Bougainville, a little refreshed, "tell me, for I have just ten minutes to spare, what the doctor said about Miss Adrienne. Nothing much, it seems, except telling her to go home and get strong. She will be quite strong soon, then?"

The question was put as if it scarcely needed an affirmative, and Bridget long remembered her mistress's look, and even her attitude, sitting comfortably at ease with her feet on the fender and her gown a little lifted, displaying her dainty silk stockings and black velvet shoes.

"Why don't you answer?" asked she, suddenly looking up. "There is nothing really wrong with the child?"

"There is—a little," said Bridget, cautiously. "I've thought so, my lady, a good while, only I didn't like to tell you. But the doctor said I must. He is coming down to-morrow to speak to you himself."

"To speak to me!"

"It's her lungs, you see; she caught cold in winter, and has coughed ever since. He wants to bring a second doctor down to examine her chest, and I thought you might be frightened, and that I had better—"

Frightened was not the word. In the mother's face was not terror, but a sort of instantaneous stony despair, as if she accepted all, and was surprised at nothing. Then it suddenly changed into fierce, incredulous resistance.

"I abhor doctors. I will not have these men coming down here and meddling with my child: she should never have gone to town. You take too much upon yourself, Bridget, sometimes."

Bridget never answered; the tears were rolling fast down her cheeks, and the sight of them seemed to alarm Lady de Bougainville more than any words.

She held out her hand. "I did not mean to be cross with you. I know I am very cross sometimes, but I have much to bear. Oh, if any thing were to go wrong with my child! But tell me—tell me the whole truth; it is best."

Bridget knew it was best, for the doctor would tell it all, in any case, to-morrow; and his opinion, as expressed to herself, had been so decided as to leave scarcely a loophole of hope. It was the common tale—a neglected cold, which, seizing upon Adrienne's feeble constitution, had ended in consumption so rapid that no remedies were possible: indeed the physician suggested none. To the patient herself he had betrayed nothing, of course, sending her away with that light cheery speech; but to the nurse he had given distinctly and decisively the fiat of doom. Within a few months, perhaps even a few weeks, the tender young life would be ended.

The whole thing was so sudden, so terrible, that even Bridget herself, who had had some hours to grow familiar with it, scarcely believed the words she felt herself bound to speak. No wonder, therefore, that the mother was utterly and fiercely incredulous.

"It is not true! I know it is not true!" she said. "Still something must be done. I will take her abroad at once—ah, no! I can't do that—but you will take her, Bridget. She

shall go any where—do any thing—thank God we are so rich!"

"If the riches could save her, poor darling!" broke in Bridget, with a sob. "I never told you how ill she was; she would not let me; she said you had enough to bear. But when you see how much she suffers daily and may have to suffer, the doctor says—oh, my lady!—you will let the child go."

"I will not!" was the fierce cry. "Any thing but this; oh, any thing but this!"

Josephine had known many sorrows—almost every kind of sorrow except death. True, she had mourned for her lost babies, and for her father; though his decease, happening peacefully at a ripe old age and soon after her own marriage, was scarcely felt at the time as a real loss. But that supreme anguish which sooner or later smites us all, when some one well-beloved goes from us, never to return—leaving behind a deep heart-wound, which closes and heals over in time, yet with a scar in its place forever—this Josephine had never known nor understood till now.

Nor did she now—even though, after the doctors had been there, the truth was forced upon her from the lips of her own child.

"Mamma," whispered Adrienne, one day, when, in the pauses of sharp suffering which often troubled a decay that otherwise would have been as beautiful as that of an autumn leaf, she lay watching her two sisters amusing themselves in her room, from which she seldom stirred now, "Chère maman, I think, after all, Gabrielle will make the best Miss de Bougainville. Hush!" laying her hand on her mother's lips, and then reaching up to kiss them, they had turned so white; "I know all; for I asked Bridget, and she told me. And I am not afraid. You may see I am not afraid."

She was not. Either from her long-confirmed ill health, and perhaps her early disappointment, life had not been so precious to poor little Adrienne as they had thought it was; or else, in that wonderful way in which dying people, though ever so young, grow reconciled to dying, death had ceased to have any terrors for her. Her simple soul looked forward to "heaven," and the new existence there, with the literal faith and confidence of a child; and she talked of her own departure, of where she would like to be buried, and of the flowers that were to be planted over her—"that I may spring up again as daisies and primroses: I was so fond of primroses"—with a composure that sometimes was startling to hear.

"You see, Bridget," she would say, "after I am gone, mamma will not be left forlorn, as if I were her only one. She will still have two daughters, both much cleverer and prettier than I, and her three sons—oh such sons!—to carry down the name to distant generations. I can be the easiest spared of us all."

And in her utter unselfishness, which had been Adrienne's characteristic from birth, she would not have her brothers sent for, or even

told of her state, lest it might shorten their enjoyments abroad, and bring them sooner back to a dreary home.

"I can love them all the same," she said; "and I want them to remember me with love, and not in any painful manner. If they just come in time for me to say good-by to them, I should like that—it will do quite well."

Thus, in the quietest and most matter-of-fact way, her sole thought being how she could give least trouble to any body, Adrienne prepared for her solemn change.

Was her mother also prepared? I can not tell. Sometimes Bridget thought she seemed to realize it perfectly, and was driven half frantic by the difficulty she had in getting away from her husband—who remained in much the same state—to her poor child, with whom every moment spent was so precious. Then again, as if in total blindness of the future, she would begin planning, as usual, her girls' winter dresses—her *three* girls; or arranging with eagerness, long beforehand, all the Christmas festivities and Christmas charities which Adrienne was to give to her poor people, who came in dozens to ask after Miss de Bougainville, and brought her little offerings of all sorts without end.

"See what a blessing it is to be rich!" Lady de Bougainville would say. "When I was at Ditchley I used to dread Christmas, because we were so poor we could do nothing for any body: now we can. How we shall enjoy it all!"

Adrienne never contradicted her, and entered into her arrangements as if she herself were certain to share them; but sometimes, when Lady de Bougainville had quitted the room, she would look after her with a sigh, saying, "Poor mamma! poor mamma!"

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that Adrienne's illness was altogether a miserable time. I think mere sickness—nay, mere death—never is, unless the poor sufferer helps to make it so. By degrees the whole household caught the reflection of Adrienne's wonderful peace and contentment in dying. The leaves that she watched falling and the flowers fading—it happened to be a remarkably beautiful autumn—did not fall and fade in a more sunshiny calm than she.

"I know I shall never 'get up May hill,' as Bridget expresses it; but I may have a few months longer among you all. I should like it, if I didn't trouble you very much."

By which she meant her own sufferings, which were often very severe—more so than any one knew, except Bridget. The nurse with her child, the wife with her husband, throughout all that dreary time, shared and yet concealed one another's cares; and managed somehow to keep cheery, more or less, for the sake of Gabrielle and Catherine, who were now the only bit of sunshine left in Brierley Hall. It began to feel chill and empty; and every one longed for, yet dreaded, the boys' return, when one day, after the bright autumn had turned almost to premature winter, Adrienne drew her

mother's face down to hers, over which had come a great and sudden change, and whispered, "Write to my brothers: tell them to come home."

So Lady de Bougainville wrote a letter in which for the first time she broke to her sons something of the truth, and why, by Adrienne's desire, it had been hitherto concealed from them.

"Come home quick," she wrote—(I have myself read the letter, for it was returned to her, and found years after among her other papers). "Come, my sons, though your merry days are done, and you are coming home to sorrow. You have never known it before; now you must. Your mother can not save you from it any longer. Come home, for I want you to help me. My heart is breaking. I sometimes feel as if I could not live another day, but for the comfort I look forward to in my three dear boys."

Thus wrote she, thus thought she at the time. Years after, how strange it was to read those words!

The letter sent, Adrienne seemed to revive a little. It was the middle of September. "They will be home, you'll see, on the 1st of October; César never breaks his word. He will not find me on the hall door steps as you promised him, mamma; but he *will* find me, I feel sure of that; I shall just see them all—and then—" Then?

That night, when forced to quit her daughter's cheerful side to keep watch in the gloomy bedroom which Sir Edward had insisted upon furnishing so sumptuously, with a huge catafalque of a bed to sleep in, and tall mirrors to reflect his figure, the miserable, little stooping figure!—that night, and in that chamber, where the blessedness of married solitude had become a misery untold, Lady de Bougainville, for the first time in her life, meditated solemnly upon the other world, whither—in how many days or hours, who could tell?—Adrienne was so fearlessly going.

It might have been that in the cloud which had fallen upon so many of her mortal delights, the blankness that she found in her worldly splendors, Josephine's mind had grown gradually prepared for what was coming upon her; or perhaps on that special day—she had reason to remember it—the invisible world was actually nearer to her than she knew; but she sat by her fire long after her husband was asleep—sat thinking and thinking, until there seemed to be more than herself in the room, and the portraits of her children on the walls followed her wistfully about, as the eyes of portraits do. She grew strangely composed, even though she knew her daughter was dying. We never recognize how we have been taught these kind of things, nor who is teaching us, but to those who believe in a spiritual world at all, there come many influences totally unaccounted for; we may have learned our lesson unawares, but we have learned it, and when the time comes we are ready.

It was one of the latter days of September—I think the 29th—that the *Times* newspaper communicated to all England, in a short paragraph, one of those small tragedies in real life which sometimes affect us outsiders more than any wholesale catastrophe, shipwreck, earthquake, or the like. The agony is so condensed that it seems greater, and comes more closely home to us. We begin to think how we should feel if it happened to ourselves, and how those feel to whom it has happened, so that our hearts are full of pity and sympathy.

Thus, on that 29th September, many a worthy father of a family, enjoying his *Times* and his breakfast together, stopped to exclaim "How shocking!" and to read aloud to wife or children, mingled with sage reflections on the dangers of Alpine exploits and of foreign traveling in general, the account of an accident which had lately befallen some Swiss tourists, in crossing the Lake of Uri from Bauen to Tell's chapel. They had put up a small sail in their crowded boat, and one of the sudden squalls which, coming down from the mountains all round it, render this one of the most perilous of the Swiss lakes, had caught and capsized them. Two of their number, said to be English—Oxford men, named Burgoyne—were drowned.

Lower down, inserted as "From a Correspondent," was another version of the catastrophe; explaining that the number in the boat was only five: three young men; an elderly gentleman, their tutor; and the boatman. The latter two had saved themselves by swimming, and were picked up not far from Bauen; but the three young fellows, brothers, after making ineffectual attempts to help one another, had all gone down. They were sons of an English gentleman of fortune, this account said; and their names were not Burgoyne, but De Bougainville.

Twenty-five years ago there was no electric telegraph, and a very uncertain foreign post; the *Times* couriers often outsped it, and news appeared there before any private intelligence was possible. Thus it happened that she of whom many a kind-hearted English matron thought compassionately that morning, wondering if those three poor lads had a mother, how the news was broken to her, and how she bore it—had no warning of the dreadful tidings at all. She read them—read them with her own eyes, in the columns of the *Times* newspaper!

Sir Edward's sole remaining interest in the outside world was his daily paper. How much of it his enfeebled mind took in was doubtful, but he liked to hear it read to him in his wife's pleasant monotonous voice; while to her this was rather a relief than not, for it killed two hours of the long dreary day. Besides, she got into a habit of reading on and on, without comprehending a single sentence; nay, often thinking of something else the whole time. As she did this morning; wondering if her boys had reached Calais, and what sort of a crossing they

would have, for the wind had been howling all night in the chimneys of Brierley Hall. Not that she was afraid of the sea, or indeed of anything; none of those sudden misfortunes which seem the portion of some lives had ever happened in hers. Though she had had no answer to her letter, it never occurred to her to be uneasy about her sons. They were sure to come home again, and in good health, for, except Adrienne, all her children inherited her own excellent constitution. That very morning she had said to Bridget, half sadly, "Oh yes. I am quite well—always am well. I think nothing could ever kill me."

She had just finished the leading articles and was turning to the police reports—any thing did for reading—when this fatal paragraph caught her eye. It might not have done so, so preoccupied was she, but for the word "Switzerland," which reminded her of her boys. So she paused to glance over it, just to herself; read it once—twice—thrice—before she could in the least take it in. When she did, her strong soul and body alike gave way. She threw up her arms with a wild shriek, and fell flat on the floor like a stone.

Admission to Sir Edward's room was rare. Sometimes whole days passed without the younger girls being sent for even to say good-morning or good-night to papa—all they ever did; and it was weeks since Adrienne had seen her father. He made no inquiry after her; seemed scarcely aware of her state, except to grudge her mother's absence in her room. Thus, after the morning visit to her sick child, it was so usual for Lady de Bougainville to spend the whole forenoon shut up with her husband, that nobody inquired for her, or thought of inquiring, until Bridget, noticing that among the letters which came in by the post was a foreign one, and not in any of the boys' handwriting, thought she would take it in to her mistress herself, and so bring sooner to Miss Adrienne, who was very feeble that day, the news of her brothers' arrival, and the hour.

Bridget knocked several times, but no one answered. Then, terribly alarmed, she pushed open the double doors of green baize, which shut off all sounds in that room from the rest of the house, and ventured in. There, the sight she saw almost confirmed a dreadful possibility which she had never dared to breathe to mortal, but which haunted poor Bridget night and day.

Sir Edward sat with his wife's head upon his knees; she lying as if she were dead, and he stroking, with a miserable sort of moan, her hands and her hair.

"Come here, Bridget; tell me what is the matter with her! I haven't hurt her, indeed I have not. I never even said one unkind word. She was just quietly reading the newspaper, when down she dropped as if somebody had shot her. Is she killed, I wonder? Then people will be sure to say I killed her. Take her, Bridget, for I must run and hide."

He shifted the poor head from his own lap to Bridget's, and the movement brought a sigh of returning life to the breast of the unfortunate mother.

Josephine had said to her eldest son in the letter which never reached him, for it came back to her unopened, that "her heart was breaking." But hers was not one of the hearts that break.

She opened her eyes, lifted herself up on her elbow, and stared wildly around.

"Something has happened. Is it Adrienne?" And then she caught sight of the newspaper on the floor. "Ah, no! It is my boys!" she shrieked. "Bridget, my boys are dead—drowned in the lake!—the newspaper says so."

"Newspapers don't always tell the truth," cried Bridget, and, terrified and bewildered as she was, bethought herself of the letter in her hand. Together the two women managed to break it open and read it, spelling it out with horrid exactness, word by word.

Alas, no! There was no refutation, nor even modification of the truth. In mercy, perhaps, came the speedy confirmation of it, before any maddening gleam of hope could arise. Her three sons were all dead—drowned and dead. Before this letter of the tutor's was written, the "bodies"—ghastly word!—had been recovered from the lake, identified, and buried; half the population of Bauen, and all the English strangers for miles round, following them to the grave. The three brothers slept side by side in a little out-of-the-way Swiss church-yard, and the name of De Bougainville was ended.

To realize the blow in all its extent was impossible. Josephine did not, or her reason would have left her. As it was, for an hour or more poor Bridget thought she had gone quite insane. She did not faint or in any way lose her consciousness again, but kept walking up and down the room, rapidly calling upon her sons by name one after the other, then falling on her knees and calling upon God.

It was an awful agony; the more so as, except by her poor servant, who watched her terrified, but attempted no consolation, it was an agony necessarily unshared. Sir Edward had crept away into a corner, muttering, "Josephine, be quiet—pray be quiet;" and then relapsing into his customary childish moan. At first she took no notice of him whatever; then, catching sight of him, with a sudden impulse, or perhaps a vague hope of giving or getting consolation, she went up to him, put her arms about his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Edward, dear husband," she cried, in a wailing voice, "Edward, our sons are dead! Do you understand? Dead—all dead. You will never see one of them any more."

He patted her cheek, and kissed her with his vacant smile. "There now, I knew you'd soon be quiet. And don't cry, Josephine; I

can't bear to see you cry. What were you saying about the boys? Dead? Oh, nonsense! They were to be home to-night. Bridget, just ring the bell and ask one of the servants if the young gentlemen are come home."

Josephine rose up, unlocked her arms from her husband's neck, and stood looking at him a minute. Then she turned away, and walking steadily to the middle of the room, stood there again, for ever so long—dumb and passive as a rock—with all her waves of misery breaking over her.

"My lady," said Bridget, at length venturing to touch her.

"Well?"

"I must go. I dare not leave Miss Adrienne any longer."

"Adrienne, did you say?" And the mother's heart suddenly turned—as perhaps Bridget had meant it should turn—from her dead sons to her still living daughter.

"Miss Adrienne is sinking fast, I think."

"Sinking! That means, dying."

Lady de Bougainville said the word as if it had been quite familiar, long-expected, painless. Hearing it, Bridget wondered if her mistress's mind were not astray again; but she looked "rational like," and even smiled as she clasped her faithful servant's hand.

"Do not be afraid, Bridget; I am quite myself now. And I have been thinking—Adrienne was so fond of her brothers. I don't know where they are—and the wild, bewildered stare came into her eyes again—"but I suppose, wherever they are, she will go to them; and soon, very soon. Why need we tell her of their death at all?"

"My lady, you could not bear it," cried Bridget, bursting into tears. "To go in and out of her room all day and all to-morrow—for she says she *will* stay till the day after to-morrow—and hear her talk so beautifully about you and them, you could not bear it."

"I think I could; if it were easier for my child. Let us try."

Without another word Josephine went and washed her face, combed out her long gray hair, which had fallen down disheveled from under her cap, arranged her collar and brooch, and then came and stood before Bridget with a steadfast, almost smiling countenance.

"Look at me now. Would she think any thing was wrong with me?"

"No, no," sobbed Bridget, choking down her full Irish heart, half bursting with its impulsive grief. But when she looked at her mistress she could not weep; she felt ashamed.

Lady de Bougainville took her old servant's hand. "You can trust me, and I can trust you. Go in first, Bridget, and tell my child her mother is coming."

And, a few minutes after, the mother came. All that long day, and the next, she went about her dying child—moving in and out between Adrienne's room and her husband's—(for Sir Edward had taken to his bed, declaring he was

"very ill," and kept sending for her every ten minutes) but never by word or look did she betray the calamity which had fallen upon her, and upon the household.

Adrienne said often during that time, "Mamma, I am such a trouble to you!" but no; her brief young life remained a blessing to the last. While the rest of the house was shut up, and the servants went about noiselessly with frightened faces, awed by the sorrow which had fallen upon the family—within Adrienne's room all was peace. While every other room was darkened, there her mother would not have the blinds drawn down, and the soft yellow sunshine fell cheerfully across the bed, where, quiet as a baby and almost as pretty, in her frilled night-gown and close cap, she slept that exhausted sleep—the forerunner of a deeper slumber, of which she was equally unafraid.

Nothing seemed to trouble her now. Once only she referred to her brothers. "Mamma, there are twenty-four hours still"—to the 1st of October she evidently meant. "I may not stay with you so long."

"Never mind, my darling."

"No, I do not mind—not much. You will give my love to the boys; and tell them to be good to you, and to Gabrielle and Catherine. They will; they were always such good boys."

"Always—always!"

Here Bridget came forward, and suggested that the mother had better go and lie down for a little.

"No; let her go to bed properly—she looks so tired. Good-night, mamma," and Adrienne held up her face to be kissed. "You will come to me the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Yes, my child."

She tottered out, and between her daughter's room and her husband's Josephine dropped insensible on the floor—where Bridget found her some minutes afterward. But nobody else knew.

To Adrienne the morning and the mother's morning kiss never came. In the middle of the night Bridget—who lay by her side asleep, "sleeping for sorrow"—woke, with a feeble touch trying to rouse her.

"I feel so strange, Bridget. I wonder what it is. Is it dying? No, no" (as Bridget started up); "don't go and wake mamma—at least not yet. She was so very tired."

The mother was not wakened; for in a few minutes more, before Bridget dared to stir—with her head on her nurse's shoulder and her hand holding hers, like a little child, Adrienne died.

* * * * *

As I said a while ago, I hardly know how to make credible the events which followed so rapidly after one another, making Brierley Hall within six months an empty, desolate, childless house. And yet they all happened quite naturally, and by a regular chain of circumstances—such as sometimes befalls, in the most strik-

ing way, a family from which death has been long absent, or has never entered at all.

At the time of Adrienne's illness there was raging in Brierley village a virulent form of scarlet-fever. Lady de Bougainville had not heard of this; or if she had, her own afflictions made her not heed it. When, before the funeral, a number of Miss de Bougainville's poor children, and parents too, begged permission to look once more at her sweet face as it lay in the coffin, the mother consented, and even gave orders that these, her child's friends, should be taken in and fed and comforted, though it was a house of mourning. And so it happened that the death they came to see they left behind them. The fever, just fading out of the cottages, took firm hold at the Hall. First a servant sickened, a girl who waited on the young ladies; and then the two children themselves. The disease was of the most malignant and rapid form. Almost before their mother was aware of their danger, both Gabrielle and Catherine had followed their brothers and sister to the unknown land. They died within a few hours of one another, and were buried on the same day.

"How can you live?" said Dr. Waters and Mr. Langhorne, coming back from the funeral, where, the father being incapable, they had acted as chief mourners. "How will you ever live?" And the two old men wept like children.

"I must live," answered Josephine, without the shadow of a tear upon her impassive, immovable face; "look at him!" She pointed to her husband, who stood at the window, absorbed in his favorite amusement of catching flies—the last solitary fly that buzzed about the pane. "You see, I must live on a little longer."

She did live; ay, until, as I once heard her say—and the words have followed, and will follow me all my life, like a benediction—she had been made to "enjoy" living.

But that was long, long afterward. Now, for many months, nay years, the desolate woman fell into that stupefied state which is scarcely living at all. I will not, I dare not describe it, but many people have known it—the condition when every thing about us seems a painted show, among which we move like automaton figures, fulfilling scrupulously our daily duties, eating, drinking, and sleeping; answering when we are addressed, perhaps even smiling back when we are smiled upon, but no more really alive, as regards the warm, breathing, pleasure-giving, pleasurable world, than the dead forms we have lately buried, and with whom half our own life has gone down into the tomb.

It was so—it could not but be—with the childless mother, left alone in her empty house, or worse than alone.

How much Sir Edward felt the death of his children, or whether he missed them at all, it was impossible to say. Outwardly, their loss seemed to affect him very little, except that he sometimes exulted in having his wife's contin-

ual company, and getting her "all to himself," as he said.

He was very fond of her, no doubt of that—fonder than ever, it appeared; and as if in some sort of compensation, he became much less trouble to her, and far easier to manage. His fits of obstinacy and violence ceased; in any difficulty she had unlimited influence over him. His inherent sweet temper returned in the shut-up life he led; no temptations from outside ever assailed him, so that all Josephine's old anxieties from her husband's folly or imprudence were forever at an end. He never interfered with her in the smallest degree; allowed her to manage within and without the house exactly as she chose; was content just to be always beside her, and carry on from day to day an existence as harmless as that of a child, or what they call in Ireland a "natural." He was never really mad, I believe, so as to require restraint—merely silly; and the constant surveillance of his wife, together with her perfect independence of him in business matters, prevented the necessity of even this fact becoming public. Upon the secrets of his melancholy illness no outside eye ever gazed, and no ear heard them afterward.

The forlorn pair still lived on at Brierley Hall. Sir Edward could not, and, fortunately, would not, be removed from thence: nor did Lady de Bougainville desire it. If she had any feeling at all in her frozen heart, it was the craving to see, morning after morning, when she rose to begin the dreary day, the sun shining on the tall spire of Brierley Church, under the shadow of which her three daughters lay: her three sons, likewise, in time; for after some years she had them brought home from Switzerland, and laid there too, to sleep all together under the honey-scented, bee-haunted lime-trees which we are so proud of in our Brierley church-yard.

In the early days of her desolation she had parted with Oldham Court, according to the conditions—which she and her son César had once laughed at as ridiculously impossible—of Mr. Oldham's will. She sold the estate, but not to a stranger; for another impossibility, as was thought, also happened. Lady Emma, so tenderly cherished, lingered several years, and before she died left a son—a living son—for whom his father bought the ancestral property, and who, taking his mother's maiden name, became in time Mr. Oldham of Oldham Court. When Lady de Bougainville heard of this, she smiled, saying, "It is well;" but she never saw the place again, nor expressed the slightest desire to do so. Indeed, from that time forward she never was ten miles distant from, nor slept a single night out of, Brierley Hall.

She and Sir Edward lived there in total seclusion. No guests ever crossed the threshold of their beautiful house; their wide gardens and pleasure-grounds they had all to themselves. In summer time they lived very much out of doors; it amused Sir Edward; and there were



"SHE USED SOMETIMES TO HEAR HER CHILDREN'S VOICES ABOUT THE EMPTY HOUSE."

neither children nor children's friends to hide his infirmities from, so that his wife let him wander wherever he chose. He followed her about like a dog, and if left a minute wailed after her like a deserted infant. His entire and childlike dependence upon her was perhaps a balm to the empty mother-heart. Bridget sometimes thought so.

It was needed. Otherwise, in the blank monotony of her days, with nothing to dread, nothing to hope for, nothing to do, in the forced self-containedness of her stony grief, and in the constant companionship of that half-insane mind, Josephine's own might have tottered from its balance. She used sometimes to have the strangest fancies—to hear her children's voices about the empty house, to see them moving in her room at night. And she would sit for hours, motionless as a statue, with her now constantly idle hands crossed on her lap; living over and over again the old life at Wren's Nest, with the impression that presently she should go back to it again, and find the narrow, noisy, poverty-haunted cottage just as before, with nothing and no one changed. At such times, if Bridget, who kept as close to her as Sir Edward's presence rendered possible, and kept every one else sedulously away, suddenly disturbed her dream, Lady de Bougainville would wonder which was the dream and which the reality; whether she were alive and her children gone, or they living and she dead.

To rouse her, there came after a while some salutary suffering. In the slow progress of his

disease, Sir Edward's failing mind took a new turn. That extreme terror of death which he had always had became his rooted and dominant idea. He magnified every little ache and pain, and whenever he was really ill fell into a condition of frantic fear. All religious consolations failed him. That peculiar form of doctrine which he professed—or rather, that corruption of it, such as is received by narrow and weak natures—did not support him in the least. He grew uncertain of what he was once so complacently sure of—his being one of the "elect;" and, in any case, the thought of approaching mortality, of being dragged away from the comfortable world he knew into one he did not know, and, despite his own poetical pictures of glory hereafter, he did not seem too sure of, filled him with a morbid terror that was the most painful phase of his illness. He fancied himself doomed to eternal perdition; and the well-arranged "scheme of salvation," which he used to discuss so glibly, as if it were a mere mathematical problem, and he knew it all, faded out from his confused brain, leaving only a fearful image of the Father as such preachers describe Him—an angry God, more terrible than any likeness of revengeful man, pursuing all His creatures who will not, or can not, accept His mercy, into the lowest deep of judgment—the hell which He has made. For this, put plainly—God forbid I should put it profanely!—is the awful doctrine which such so-called Christians hold—also, strange to say, many most real and earnest Christians, loving

and tender, pitiful and just ; who would not for worlds act like the God they believe in. Which mystery we can only solve by hoping that, under its external corruption, there is a permanent divineness in human nature which makes it independent of even the most atrocious creed.

But Sir Edward's religion was of the head, not of the heart ; a creed, and nothing more. When, in his day of distress, he leaned upon it, it broke like a reed. His feeble mind went swinging to and fro in wild uncertainty, and he clung to his wife with a desperation pitiful to see.

"Don't leave me ! not for a minute," he would say, during their long weary days and dreadful nights, "and pray for me—keep always praying, that I may not die, that I may be allowed to live a little longer."

Poor wretch ! as if in the Life-giver and Lifetaker—omnipotent as benign—he saw only an avenging demon, lower even than the God whom, after his small material notions, he had so eloquently described, and so patronizingly served. At this time, if she had not had her six dead children to think of—her children, so loving and loved, whom God could not have taken in anger ; who, when the first shock of their death had passed away, began to live again to her, as it were ; to wander about her like ministering angels, whispering, "God is good, God is good still"—but for this, I doubt, Josephine would have turned infidel or atheist.

As it was, the spectacle of that miserable soul, still retaining consciousness enough to be aware of its misery, roused her into a clear, bold, steady searching out of religious truth, so far as finite creatures can ever reach it. And she found it—by what means it is useless here to relate, nor indeed would it avail any human being, for every human being must search out truth for himself. Out of the untenable negation to which her husband's state of mind led, there forced itself upon hers a vital affirmative ; the only alternative possible to souls such as that which God had given her—a soul which longs after Him, can not exist without Him, is eager to know and serve Him, if He only will show it the way ; but whether or not, determinately loving Him ; which love is, to itself, the most conclusive evidence of His own.

I do not pretend to say that Lady de Bougainville was ever an "orthodox" Christian ; indeed, unlike most Christians, she never took upon herself to decide what was orthodox and what heterodox ; but a Christian she became ; in faith and life, and also in due outward ceremonial ; while in her own spirit she grew wholly at peace. Out of the clouds and thick darkness in which He had veiled Himself, she had seen God—God manifest in Christ, and she was satisfied.

"It is strange," she would say to Bridget, when coming for a moment's breathing space out of the atmosphere of religious despair which surrounded poor Sir Edward—"strange, but

this gloom only seems to make my light grow stronger. I used to talk about it—we all do—but never until my darlings were there did I really believe in the other world."

And slowly, slowly, in the fluctuations of his lingering illness, did she try to make it as clear to her husband as it was to herself. Sometimes she succeeded for a little, and then the shadows darkened down again. But I can not, would not even if I could, dilate on the history of this terrible time, wherein day by day, week by week, and month by month, Josephine was taught the hardest lesson possible to a woman of her temperament—patiently and without hope to endure.

There is a song which of all others my dear lady used most to like hearing me sing ; it is in Mendelssohn's *Oratorio of "St. Paul"* : "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life." I never hear it, with its sweet, clear tenor notes dying away in the words "Be thou faithful—be thou faithful until death," without thinking of her. She was "faithful."

Sir Edward had a long season of failing health ; but at last the death of which he was frightened came upon him unawares. The old heart-disease, which had once been so carefully concealed from him, after lying dormant for years, till his wife herself had almost forgotten it, reappeared, and advanced quicker than the disease of the brain. It was well. That final time of complete idiocy, which the doctors warned her must be, and to which, though she kept up her strength to meet it, she sometimes looked forward with indescribable dread, would never come.

Her husband woke up one night, oppressed with strange sensations, and asked, as his daughter Adrienne had asked, but oh, with what a different face—"Can this be dying ?"

It was ; his wife knew it, and she had to tell him so.

Let me cover over that awful scene. Bridget was witness to it, until even she was gently thrust away by her beloved mistress, who for more than an hour afterward, until seclusion was no longer possible, locked the door.

Toward morning, the mental horrors as well as the bodily sufferings of the dying man abated a little ; but still he kept fixed upon his wife that frightened gaze, as if she, and she only, could save him.

"Josephine!" he cried continually, "come near me—nearer still ; hold me fast ; take care of me!"

"I will," she said, and lay down beside him on the bed—her poor husband, all she had left in the world!—almost praying that it might be the will of God to lengthen out a little longer his hopeless, useless life, even though this might prove to herself a torture and a burden greater than she could bear. But all the while she felt her wish was vain ; that he must go—was already going.

"Edward," she whispered, and took firm

hold of the nerveless hand which more than thirty years ago had placed the wedding-ring upon her finger—"Edward, do not be afraid; I am close beside you—to the very last."

"Yes," he said, "but afterward? Where am I going? Tell me, where am I going? Or go with me. Can you not go with me?"

"I wish I could!" she sobbed. "Oh, Edward, I wish I could!"

Then again she told him not to be afraid. "Say 'Our Father,' just as the children used to do at night. He is our Father. He will not harm you. He will only touch you—though how, I do not know; but surely, surely He will! Edward—husband," pressing closer to his ear as the first struggles of death came on, and the blindness of death began to creep over his eyes. "There is nothing to be afraid of; God is good."

And then, when speech had quite failed him, Josephine crept down on her knees beside the bed, and repeated in her sweet, clear voice, "Our Father, which art in heaven," to the end.

The words, comprehensible to the feeblest intellect, yet all that the sublimest faith can arrive at, might have reached him, or might not, God knows! but the dying man's struggles ceased, and a quiet look, not unlike his daughter Adrienne—the one of his children who most resembled him—came over his face. In that sudden "lightening before death" so often seen, he opened his eyes, and fixed them on his wife with the gaze almost of her young lover Edward Scanlan. She stooped and kissed him; and while she was kissing him he slipped away, where she could not "take care" of him any more.

Thither—it is not I who dare follow and judge him. Poor Sir Edward de Bougainville!

THE EPILOGUE,

WHICH perhaps none will listen to. They may say, "The curtain has fallen; the play is played out. No more!"

But the play was not played out. Who dare say, "My work is done," till the breath fails wherewith to say it? Thus, if after her sad and stormy life it pleased Heaven to give a sunshiny sunset to my dear Lady de Bougainville, why should I not tell it? even though the telling involves more than people may care to hear of this insignificant life of mine—which only became of value after I fell in love with her. But there was once a little mouse who gnawed the net-meshes of an imprisoned lion; and though the creature never pretended to be any thing but a mouse, I think it must have been a very happy-minded mouse ever afterward.

Where shall I take up my story? From the day when she turned the key of the little hair-trunk, thereby silently locking up—as, child almost as I was, I felt that I myself would have locked up—the treasure-house of the past? I asked her no questions, and she gave me no

explanations; but from that hour there arose an unspoken tenderness and a sympathy stronger even than that which not seldom draws together the old and the young, in spite of—nay, rather on account of—the great difference between them. Contrast without contrariety is one of the great laws of harmonious Nature; and two people, however unlike, who have the same ideal, will probably suit one another better than many who seem more akin. It was just as when, on reading some great poet—so great, yet so simple—I used to be astonished and yet pleased that I could comprehend him. So, I grew worthier and better in my own sight to find I could in a dim, feeble way understand Lady de Bougainville.

Are no love-vows registered except by lovers? I think there are. I could tell of a certain little maid who lay awake half the night, thinking of caliphs and viziers, and old trunks with dead children's clothes; and of what King David said about the term of mortal life being threescore years and ten, "and if by reason of strength we attain unto fourscore years." Ten years more, then. Ten years to try and fill up a blank life; to make a dull life cheerful, perhaps even happy. Ten years for a motherless child to give passionate, adoring filial duty to the mother of six dead children; receiving—well, perhaps nothing; but it mattered not. The delight was in the duty, not its reward: in the vow and its fulfillment, rather than in the way it might be accepted by its object. This, time would show. Meanwhile, in the dead of night, with the last flicker of flame lighting up the wax figure of John the Baptist, and the white owl—which had brought up her young, I heard, year after year in the ivied court-yard below—hooting mournfully under the window, the vow was made. And, thank God! I have kept it to this day.

When I came down at eight o'clock, it was to an everyday breakfast-table, where sat—no, not an everyday old lady, talking to an old woman, as broad as she was long, with a kind, good, ugly face, who stood behind her chair. Mistress and servant were, I believe, nearly the same age, but the former looked much the older. They were talking together with that respectful tenderness on one side, and friendly confidence on the other, which mark at once two people who in this relation have spent together nearly all their lives.

Lady de Bougainville looked up as I entered, and turned upon me—a little suddenly, as if she had momentarily forgotten me—her beautiful smile.

I began this book by a picture of her, as near as I could draw it, as she first appeared to me. Now, when I have since tried to paint her in different shape, will the likeness be recognizable? Will any one trace in the stately lady of seventy, sitting placidly at her lonely breakfast-table, the passionate Josephine Scanlan of Wren's Nest? Still less will there be read in the sweet old face—the cheeks of which were

pink and fresh as a child's, for she had been out in her garden, she told me, since seven in the morning—those years of anguish and trial, ending in the total desolation of the widowed wife and childless mother, from whom God had taken every thing—every thing! leaving her alive, and that was all.

Strange—inconceivably strange!—and yet most true. Sometimes—as she showed me that day in one of her favorite laurels—when a healthy tree has been blighted by frost, if it still retains a fragment of vitality it will shoot up again, not in its old shape, but in a different one, and thus live on. So did she.

"Bridget," said Lady de Bougainville, "this is Miss Weston, who has been so very ill, and is come to us to be made well again. Bridget will look after you and take care of you, my dear. She is wonderful at nursing, and rather likes having somebody to make a fuss over."

Bridget courtesied, with a fond look at her lady; and then, softening a little, I suppose, at my white face—for I was very weak still—hoped with true Irish politeness that I should soon get better; every body must feel the better for coming to Brierley Hall. In which sentiment I cordially agreed with her. And perhaps she was sharp enough to see my heart in my eyes, for she gradually became mild toward me, and we grew capital friends, Bridget and I.

And Bridget's mistress?

I have a distinct recollection of every hour of that day, the first whole day that I spent with her, and which was the type of many other days; for they were all alike. Existence went on like clock-work in that great, lonely, peaceful, beautiful house. At seven—winter and summer—the mistress was in her garden, where she had a personal acquaintance with every flower and bush and tree, and with every living thing that inhabited them.

"I think," she said to me one day, "I am fonder of my garden than even of my house, because, you see, it is alive. And it is always busy—always growing. Even at my time of life I like to see things busy and growing."

She was always busy, certainly. To my surprise, directly after breakfast she sat down to her "work;" and very hard work it was, too. First, the management of her household, into the details of which she entered with the minutest accuracy: liberal, but allowing no waste; trustful, but keeping a careful observation of every thing. Next, the "stewardship," as she called it, of her large fortune, which entailed much correspondence; for her public and private charities seemed endless. She was the best woman of business I ever knew. She answered her letters every day, and paid her bills every week: "For," she said, "I wish those that come after me to have, when I die, as little trouble as possible."

This solitary living—solitary dying—which she referred to so continually and so calmly—at first seemed to me very terrible. Yet beautiful too; for it was a life utterly out of herself.

Sitting at her little writing-table, in her corner by the fire, she seemed forever planning how, by purse or influence or kindly thoughtfulness, she could help others. "I have nothing else to do," she said, when I noticed this; and then, as if shrinking from having said too much, or betrayed too much by the sigh which accompanied the words, she began hastily to tell me the history of a letter she was then writing to a certain Priscilla Nunn, for whom she had just bought an annuity.

"I paid it myself for several years, and then I began to think, suppose I were to die first, what would become of Priscilla? So I have made all safe to-day; I am so glad."

She looked glad, with the pure joy that has nothing personal in it; and then, in that pretty garrulousness which was almost the only sign of age about her, began to tell me more of this Priscilla Nunn, and how she, Lady de Bougainville, had once sewed for her.

"For money, Winifred. For, as I told you last night, I was once very poor."

"But you are not sorry to be rich? Not sorry to be able to do such things as you have just now been doing. Oh, it must be grand—grand! To sit in your quiet corner here, and stretch invisible comforting hands half over the world, just like Providence itself. How I envy you! What it must be to have power, unlimited power, to make people happy!"

"God only can do that," she said, gravely.

"Yes; but He uses you to do it for Him."

I know not how the words came into my mouth, but they did come, and they seemed to please Lady de Bougainville. She laid her hand upon mine, very kindly.

"You speak 'wiser than you are ware of,' and even an old woman is not too old to learn wisdom from the lips of a child."

Then she rose, and saying her work was done for to-day, took me with her into the library.

That library, what a world of wealth it was!—an ancient and modern literature, down to last month's reviews and magazines.

"I took to reading twenty years ago, to keep myself from thinking," said Lady de Bougainville; "and in my long evenings I have taught myself a little of modern languages. But I never was an educated woman. No doubt," she added, with a smile, "you, a modern young lady, know a great deal more than I."

Perhaps I did, having swallowed an enormous quantity of unassimilated mental food; but I was a starved young pedant still, and I had not lived three days with Lady de Bougainville before she taught me the wholesomest lesson a girl of my age could learn—my own enormous ignorance.

Taught it me quite unconsciously, in daylight walks and fireside talks; when, after her long lack of any companionship, even mine, such as it was, proved not unwelcome to that strong, clear brain, which had come to the rescue of the empty heart and saved it from breaking.

Yet there was a good deal of eccentricity

about her too, and about her way of life, which had long fallen into such a mechanical round that she disliked the slightest change therein. To press one hour's duties into the next one, to delay or alter a meal, to rise later or go to bed earlier than usual, was to her an actual pain. But these were only the little spots in my sun. She shone still, the centre of her peaceful world; from her radiated all the light it had; and, in its harmony and regularity, I, poor little wandering star that I was! first learned, in great things and small, the comfort, the beauty, the actual divineness of heaven's first law—Order.

Yet when I lived longer with her, and, my visit over, found some excuse, often so shallow that she actually smiled, for coming to see her nearly every day, it was impossible not to allow that Brierley was right in calling Lady de Bougainville "peculiar." She had some crotchets, absolute crotchets, which one would have smiled at but for the causes which had originated them, too sad for any smile. She never would enter a single house in Brierley—that is, a well-to-do house, though she often crossed the thresholds of the poor. Nor would she have any visitors of her own rank; she shut her doors, as I once told her, laughing, upon all "respectable" people. Even my father, except for his formal clerical visits, was not admitted there any more than the old rector had been. She seemed to shrink from all association with the outside world—that is, personal association—though she knew all that was going on therein, and liked to hear of events and people, near and remote, in which I tried to interest her. But though she listened, it was always with a gentle indifference, as if that long frozen-up heart, which was kind to all living things, was capable only of kindness, nothing more; the warm throb of responsive human affection being stilled in it forever.

I often thought so. And when I, in my impetuous youth, used day after day to spring up the entrance steps, guarded by their two huge stone vases, and, with an expectation eager as any of the "fellows" (as Lady G. in "Sir Charles Grandison" calls them) that used to come a-courting to the young gentlewomen in hoops and farthingales who once inhabited Brierley Hall—I went in search of my beautiful old lady, my silly heart often sank down like lead. For, though she always paused in whatever she was doing, to give me the gentle "Is that you, my dear? how kind of you to come and see me," I felt, by her very use of the word, that her heart toward me was only "kind"—that was all.

Well! how could it be otherwise? What a foolish girl was I to expect it to be, otherwise! And yet it sometimes made me a little sad to think I had only the stubble end of her life, while she reaped the whole rich harvest of mine. "Ridiculous!" most people would say; "Contemptible!" I think she would have said, who of all women most understood what that love is which loves freely, hoping for nothing again.

Yet I fretted a good deal about it, until chance brought my trouble to a climax, and me to my right senses for evermore.

Somebody hinted to my father that I was going too much to Brierley Hall; that people would say I had designs upon the old lady, who had a large fortune and no heirs. So he, being a proud man, dear heart! and a sorrowful, hard life had made him prouder still, when my next invitation came, forbade my going thither.

I rebelled. For the first time in our lives my father and I had words—and bitter words, too. I was not a child now; I was past seventeen, with a strong will of my own; and it was not only my own pleasure that I grieved to lose. Summer had gone by, that long, bright summer when I had been made so happy at Brierley Hall, and grown familiar with every nook within and without it. Now, the bare trees stretched empty arms up to the leaden winter sky, and within the house—the large, chilly, gloomy house—where the Christmas holly smiled forlornly upon the vacant rooms, sat one lonely old woman, who, rich as she was, sweet and lovable as every day I found her more and more to be, was still only a woman, lonely and old.

"I will go to her, whatever you say!" cried I, in a passion of tears, and rushed from my father, hardly knowing what I was doing, or what I meant to do—rushed through the stormy afternoon to Brierley Hall.

Lady de Bougainville was sitting in the cedar parlor, the smallest and least dreary of all the rooms. For a wonder she was doing nothing, only looking into the fire, which had dropped into hollow blackness, as if long unstirred.

"How good of you, Winny, to come all through the rain! I am quite idle, you see, though I have plenty of work to do. Perhaps it is the fault of my eyes, and not the dark day, but I can not manage to thread my needle."

She spoke a little sadly. I knew, if she had a dread in this world it was of her sight failing her, of growing "dark," as Bridget called it, which to one so independent in her ways, and disliking dependence more even than old people usually do, would have been darkness indeed.

"Still, if it comes," added she, sighing again (I knew what "it" meant), "I hope I shall be able to bear it."

"It will not come, and if it did, you would bear it," said I, passionately, as I sat down on the foot-stool beside her, and took possession of her dear old hand, playing ostensibly with the emeralds and diamonds which covered it. But it was the hand I loved, soft and warm, strong and delicate, lovely to look at, lovely to feel; as I can see and feel it still, though—No, I will have none of these tears. We may weep over the blasted, withered corn, the grain trodden under foot, or scattered unreaped to the winds of heaven; but when the ripe sheaf is gathered into the garner, then who grieves?

Let me remember her as she sat in her easy-chair and I sat at her feet, trying to amuse her all I could; with tales of the village, of the

neighbors, of various Christmas treats in the school-rooms and the alms-houses, and so on. To all of which she listened with her usual smile; and I kept up mine too as well as I could. But I was not good at deception, I suppose, for she said, suddenly:

"Winifred, there is something on your mind; tell me what it is. I should be sorry if any trouble were to come near my merry little Mouse." (Mouse was a name she had for me from my smallness, my bright eyes—yes, I fancy they were bright, being like my father's—and the brown of my hair.)

The kind words—so unexpected—touched me to the quick. Bursting into tears, I poured out to her my grievous woe and wrong.

"Is that all? What mountains of mole-hills we do make at seventeen! To be in such despair from a lost visit! My silly little girl!"

I drew back in sensitive pain. Evidently, the real cause of my grief, the dread I had of being separated from her, and the fact that the chief happiness of my life consisted in being with her, had never occurred to my dear old lady.

It was hard: even now I recognize that it was hard. And I do not hate poor Winny Weston, that the bitterness and anguish of her heart found vent in exaggerated words.

"Silly am I! I know that, and no wonder you think so. It is no matter to you how seldom I see you, or if I am never allowed to see you again. I am nothing to you, while you are every thing to me."

A declaration as impetuous as that of any young man in love—nay, I have taunted one young man with its being more so! No wonder Lady de Bougainville was a little astonished by it—until, perceiving how real my emotion was, she, with a curious sort of look—

"Half smiling, half sorry,
Gazed down, like the angels in separate glory,"

upon poor, foolish, miserable me.

Then she spoke seriously, even sadly: "Winny, I had no idea you cared for me so much; I thought no one ever would care for me again in this world."

While she spoke a quiver ran across her features, and a dimness—I could hardly believe it tears, for I had never seen her shed one—gathered in her eyes.

"You are very good," she said again—"very good to an old woman like me; and I am grateful."

Grateful! Lady de Bougainville grateful to me? And telling me so with that sweet dignity which made me more than ever ashamed of myself; for had I not heard her say more than once, that the love which worries its object with jealous exactions is not love, but the merest selfishness?

I hung my head. I begged her pardon. "But," I said, "this is hard for me—harder than you think. What chance have I of learning to be good, and sensible, and womanly, excepting through you? I thought you would

have 'grown' me, as you do your young servants and your cabbages."

I had made her smile, which was what I wanted; also, perhaps, to wipe out with a siller jest the remembrance of my romantic folly.

"And then, as you told me once, no sooner do they get hearts in them than some young man of Brierley finds it out and carries them off. It would be just the same with you, Winny!"

"Never!" I cried, indignantly; "I wish for nothing better than to spend my whole life beside you."

"Ah! that is what children often say to their parents, yet they marry for all that."

"I never would, if I were a child of yours."

"A child of mine!" The words seemed to pierce her like sharp steel. "You forget I have no children—that is, all my children are in heaven. No one on earth can ever replace them to me."

I had gone too far; I recognized it now. Recognized, too, with a passionate sympathy that almost took away the personal pain, what tenacity of faithfulness was in this strong heart of hers, which admitted no substitutes. Other interests might cluster round it outside, but its inner, empty niches would remain empty forever.

"No," I said, gently—not even attempting to repossess myself of her dear hand, which had slid from mine somehow—"neither I nor any one could ever dream of replacing to you your children. But you will let me be your little servant? I love you so."

She was touched, I saw. Even through the frost of age, and of those many desolate years, she felt the warmth of this warm young love of mine. Stooping down she kissed me affectionately; and giving me one of her hands, sat, with the other shading her face, for ever so long. We made no mutual protestations—indeed I think we hardly exchanged another word on the subject—but from that hour our relations seemed to rest on quite a different footing, and we understood tacitly that they were to last for life.

I could have sat forever at her feet, catching glimpses of her face in the fire-light, and wondering how it felt to have had every thing and lost every thing, and to come to sit at seventy years of age by a vacant hearth, with all one's treasures in heaven; and, as the Bible says, "where one's treasure is, there will one's heart be also." Wondering, too, whether it was that which caused the peace that I saw gradually growing in her face, as at last removing her hand she left it for me to gaze at. It was quite bright now.

"I have made up my little plans, Winny," said she, cheerfully, "and you shall hear from me to-morrow—that is, your father shall. Now go home to him, for it is growing dark, and he will be anxious. Happy you to have a father who is anxious over you! We must not vex him. Parents first, always."

"Yes," I answered, but it might have been a little dolefully, and more lingeringly even than usual I might have taken my departure; for just at the door Lady de Bougainville called me back.

"Child"—and the hand she laid on my shoulder was firm as that of youth, and her eyes blazed as they might have done thirty or forty years ago. "Child, be wise! Before you sleep, make friends with your father, and be thankful that he is such a father—a prudent, tender, honorable man. All men are not so. Sometimes it is the will of God to tie together, by relationship or marriage, people who are so unlike that, if not thus tied, they would fly from one another to the world's end. And sometimes"—her voice sank lower—"it is right so to fly. They have to choose between good and evil, between God and man. Pity them, but let no one dare to judge them—no one can—except the Judge of all."

She stopped, trembling violently. Why, I knew not then; I do now. But very soon she recovered herself—the sooner, I think, because she saw that I understood nothing below the mere words she was saying. All I did was to stand shamefaced before her—she, who was so wise, so good; so infinitely wiser and better than I could ever hope to be. I said so.

"No," she answered, sadly; "neither good nor wise. Only one can not live seventy years and learn nothing. Therefore, Winifred, listen to me. Never say to any one what you said to me to-day—that you wished you could leave your father. Some have to do it, as I said: children from parents, wives from husbands, must turn and depart. And if it has to be done"—and she drew herself erect, and her eyes flashed, almost fiercely, till I could understand what a fierce woman she must have been in her youth—"if it must be done, I say, Do it! unflinchingly, without remorse. Cut off the rotten branch; fly from the plague-stricken house. Save your soul, and fly. But, oh! not till the last extremity, not till all hope is gone—if it ever is quite gone: we can not tell. Child, those whom God has given you, have patience with them; *He* has. Hold fast by them, if it be possible, to the end."

And as she looked at me I saw all her fierceness ebb away, and a tenderness, deeper than even its usual peaceful look, grow on her dear face.

"Now go, my dear. I have said enough, perhaps too much, but I want you to be friends again with your father. I think," she added—(was it with a natural fear at having betrayed any thing, which I understood not then, but do now?)—"I think I am sensitive on the subject of fathers—mine was very dear to me. He died—let me see—full fifty years ago; yet I remember him, and all about that time, more clearly than I remember many nearer things. We were very happy together, my father and I."

She spoke calmly and cheerfully, as it seems people do learn to speak of their dead after fifty

years; and, kissing me, sat down again once more in her quiet arm-chair by her solitary fire.

Next day my father showed me a letter which he had just received from Lady de Bougainville, asking his permission for me to be her reader and amanuensis for two hours every forenoon. She needed such help, she said, because of her failing eyesight, and preferred mine because she was used to me, and "loved" me.

"Not that I wish to monopolize your daughter." (I smiled to see how boldly her noble candor cut the knot that would have perplexed a feebler hand.) "Still less do I intend, as I hear is reported in Briarley, to leave her my fortune. It has been left, for many years, to a charity. But I wish to make her independent, to put in her hand what every woman ought to have—a weapon wherewith, if necessary, to fight the world."

She therefore proposed, instead of salary, to give me first-rate masters of every kind, and that I should take my lessons of afternoons, at Briarley Hall. This would make all easy, she said, during my father's frequent absence from home all day long. "And you may trust me to take care of your child," she added. "I was a mother once."

This last touch went to my father's heart—a tender heart, for all its pride.

"Poor lady—poor lady!" said he. And after reading the letter over once again, with the comment, "She is a wise old woman, this grand friend of yours," consented to it without reserve.

Thus my life was made plain to me—plain and clear—busy and bright; nay, brighter than I ever expected. For my father himself, on his own account, began to admire Lady de Bougainville.

Hitherto they had held aloof, for they differed widely theologically. She listened to his sermons—never commenting, never criticising—and that was all. But, as she slowly found out, whether or not he preached it, he lived "the Gospel." "Winny," said she to me one day, when she had watched him into one of those miserable cottages which were the disgrace of our parish, where, like most increasing parishes, the new-built palatial residences of our rich neighbors drove our poor neighbors to herd together like pigs in a sty—"Winny, some of these days I should like to see a little more of your father. Once, I believed in the Church in spite of the minister; now, I believe in the Church—and the minister."

And when I told him this, again he said, "Poor lady!" For my father, like the late Reverend Sir Edward de Bougainville—of whom he had chanced to hear a good deal, since he came here, from an Irish dean he knew—was a Low-Church clergyman.

Low-Church, High-Church, Broad-Church—what insane distinctions! Oh, that I could obliterate them all! Oh, that I could make every one who serves at the altar like this dear father

of mine—whom I do not paint here, for he is mine, and he lives still, thank God! He and I do not agree entirely; like many another child, I fancy Heaven has granted to me clearer light and purer air than to my father; but I love him! I love him! and I believe God loves us both.

And we both of us lived and grew together in love more and more, under the shadow of that beautiful and benign old age of Lady de Bougainville. I can not picture it—who could?—but it was most like one of those November days which always remind me of her; when the whole world seems spiritualized into a sunshiny tranquillity, so that we notice neither sodden leaves nor withered flowers, nor silent gardens empty of birds, but delight ourselves in the celestial beauty of the departing year, as if it were to remain with us forever.

On just such a day, the 18th of November (for though I did not note the date, others did), something happened which was the first break in the heavenly monotony of our lives, and which therefore, I suppose, I ought to set down, though to me then, and long afterward, it seemed a matter of little moment.

We had been sitting, Lady de Bougainville and I, in the summer-house by the lake, where we still spent every fine afternoon. She had two "crotchets," she called them, being quite aware of every weakness she had, and now and then half apologizing for some of them; she liked to live like a bird in the open air, and every day to see the last of the sun. He was setting now, gorgeously, as he often does in November, in front of us, and making a second sunset glow in the yellowing elm-leaves which still hung on the boughs of the wood behind. For the park round Brierley Hall was full of magnificent trees—the relics of the old chase—and its mistress barricaded herself with them against those horrible villas which were rising up, like red and yellow fungi, on every side. It was her weak point, that and the new railway, now crawling like a snake every day nearer and nearer, till as we sat here we could hear the navvies hammering in the cutting below.

It vexed her—even in her calm old age, it vexed her. She saw no beauty in these modern improvements, which were making our pretty village like a London suburb; and she hated, with an almost amusing wrath—which I rather delighted in, since it brought her down to the level of common mortals—every new-built house that lifted up its ugly head, chimney-laden, to stare into her green domain.

"There is another, I declare!" she cried, catching a sight which I had noticed days before, but kept to myself. Now the thinned trees discovered it all too plain. "Look, Winifred, your eyes are better than mine. Is there not building a great, yellow-brick house, with a turret to it, which will overlook us where we sit? Horrible! I never infringe on my neighbors' rights, but I must preserve my own. This must be seen to immediately."

I encouraged her wrath, I fear, for it did my

heart good to see it—to find her so much "of the earth earthy." Since these three days she had been kept indoors with one of the slight illnesses which sometimes came even to her healthy old age, and which she called, with the quaint phraseology she often used, "her messages from home."

So I followed her, smiling to myself, as with a firm, indignant step she walked home, fast as any young woman, and sent a message to the owner, builder, foreman, or whoever was in charge of the obnoxious house, that Lady de Bougainville wished to speak to him immediately.

I smiled then. I smile now, with a strange, half-sad content, to think how little we know what is before us, and upon what merest trifles hang all the momentous things of our lives.

Immediately, as she had requested—indeed so soon that we had hardly time to recover our equilibrium, since even such a small thing as this was an event in our quiet days—appeared a gentleman—yes; Bridget, who saw him waiting in the hall, was certain he was a gentleman—who sent up his card, saying he was the architect of the house opposite.

"Mr. Edward Donelly! An Irish name," said Lady de Bougainville, shrinking back with vainly suppressed repugnance. "I think I would rather not see him. I have not seen a stranger for so many years. Winifred, will you speak to him?"

I might have reasoned, but had long ceased to reason, against those dear, pathetic "peculiarities" of hers—may others have patience with mine when I am seventy years old! So, unhesitatingly—thinking only to save her from any annoyance, and furious against house, owner, architect, any one who should presume to annoy her—her, before whom I would have laid myself down as a mat for her feet to walk over—I marched into the cedar parlor.

There stood a—yes, he was a gentleman, though not an elderly one, as I had expected. He seemed about five or six and twenty, tall—six feet and more—which gave him a most unpleasant advantage over me, poor furious pigmy that I was! A worse advantage was his look of exceeding good-humor, his apparent unconsciousness of having offended me or any body else in the world. Such a bright, honest, cheerful face, such a pleasant manner! It was irritating to the last degree.

"Lady de Bougainville, I presume? No—I beg your pardon," and he actually smiled, the wretch! "She is, I hear, an elderly lady. What does she want with me? Is there any thing—something about this new house, her messenger thought—in which I can oblige her?"

"Only by pulling it down—every brick of it," cried I, throwing down the gauntlet and rushing into battle at once. "You ought to do this, for it overlooks her property, and annoys her excessively. And nobody ought to annoy her, at her age, and so good as she is. Nobody ever should, if I could help it."

"Are you her daughter, or niece?" said Mr. Donelly, looking at me in a curious way; no doubt my anger amused him excessively, but he was too polite to show it. And then—with-out waiting for the answer to his question, which perhaps he felt he had no right to put—he went on to explain to me, very quietly and courteously, that his employer, having bought the ground, had a perfect right to build upon it any house he chose, provided it was not obnoxious to his neighbors.

"Which is, indeed, the last thing he would desire; for, though only a plebeian, as you call him—in fact a retired tradesman—he is a very worthy fellow. I feel with him, for I also am a self-made man; my father was a mechanic." Mr. Donelly said this with a composure that quite startled me. "But I can feel, too, for Lady de Bougainville, who, I suppose, belongs to the aristocratic class, and is well on in years besides. It must be very trying to her prejudices—I beg your pardon, her opinions—to have to put up with many things of our modern time, which are nevertheless quite inevitable, as they form part of the necessary progress of the world."

"Thank you," said I, "but I did not wish a sermon." Certainly not from a mechanic's son, I was just on the point of adding, with that bitter little tongue of mine; but when I looked at the young man, something in his frank honesty, combined with a way he had of putting unpleasant truths in the least unpleasant manner, and of never saying a rough word where a smooth one would do, disarmed me. Ay, even though he was an Irishman, had an Irish accent, and an Irish way with him, not exactly "blarney," but that faculty which both French and Irish have of turning toward you the sunshiny side of the plum—oiling the wheels of life so as to make them run easily and without grating. And when the plum is thoroughly ripe, and the machinery sound and good, what harm? As Lady de Bougainville once said to me, "You English are very, very good; would it cost you much to be a little more what we French call *agrable*?"

He was decidedly agreeable, both in the French and English sense, this Mr. Donelly; and before we parted he made me a promise—very earnestly, too—that he would use his best endeavors with his principal to avoid all annoyance to Lady de Bougainville.

When I told her this she shook her head. "Was he an Irishman, my dear?"

"I think so."

"Then trust him not;" and she grew a shade paler, and set her lips together in their hardest line. "I say nothing against Irishwomen—look at my Bridget, for instance—but I believe it to be almost impossible for an Irishman either to speak the truth or keep a promise."

Is that quite just? thought I, and should have said so—for I never was afraid of speaking my mind to her now; she liked me all the better for it—but by this time I had heard a

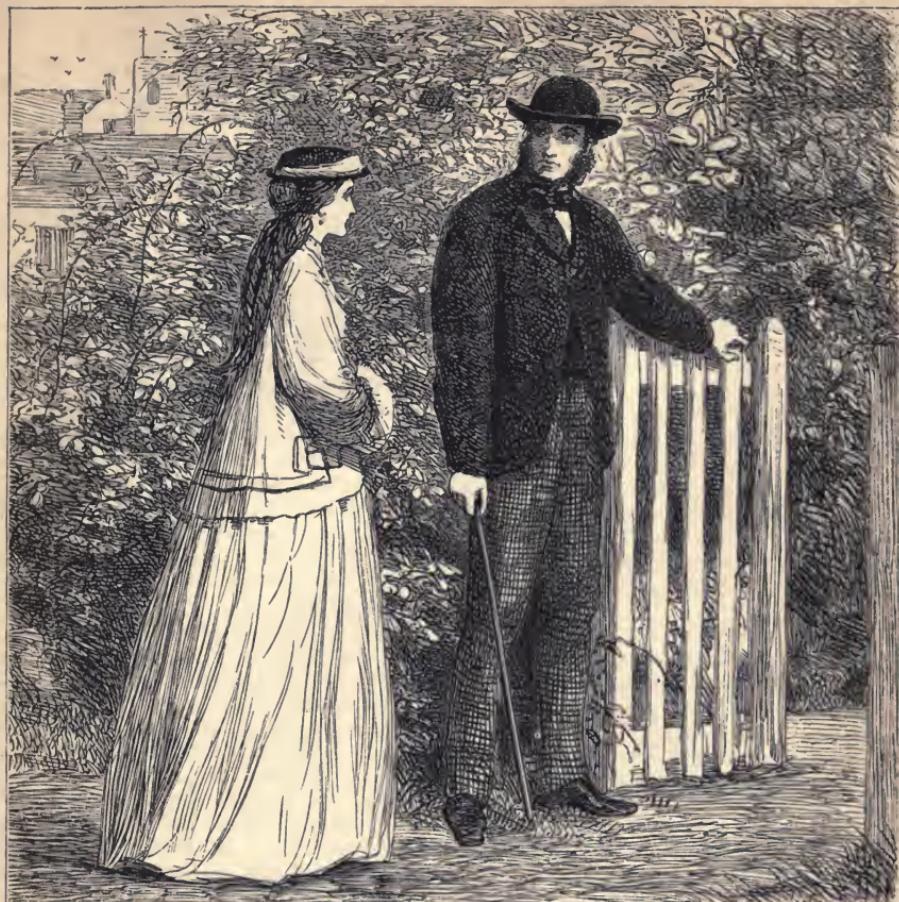
good deal, and guessed more, of her history, and knew from what a bitter soil this rank growth had sprung; so I held my tongue. Was it for me to begin to lesson Lady de Bougainville?

Only, with my strong resistance to injustice, even though it were hers, I took some precaution against the fulfillment of her prophecy, and also against her being troubled in any way by the intrusive house. I got my father to go and speak to the owner himself, who was of course his parishioner, about it. And this resulted in more than I intended; for in the great dearth of educated and companionable men in Brierley, my father and the architect, who was lodging in the village, struck up an acquaintance; and one day Mr. Donelly was actually invited to tea, entirely without my knowledge—indeed I was much annoyed at it at the time, and complained bitterly to Lady de Bougainville at having to entertain a mere mechanic's son.

"You terrible little Tory," said she; "but you will grow wiser in time. Is he an honest man's son? For that is the real question always: and yet not always; good fruit sometimes springs from a worthless tree. Still it is a great mystery, my dear, a great mystery," continued she, falling into that tone of gentle moralizing, which was not unnatural at her age, when life's doing is all done, and its placid thinking alone remains. But she seemed to dislike both thinking and speaking of this Mr. Donelly; I well knew why, and so I ceased to refer to him any more.

Of which, by-and-by, I was only too glad. Let me, without either sentiment or egotism, get over as fast as I can the next event in my quiet life—a life which, looked back on now, seems so perfect, that a whole year was but as one long sunshiny day.

Mr. Donelly came to our house very often, and—just as I used to come to Brierley Hall—on every excuse he could. My father liked him. So, in degree, did I. That is, I thought him very honest, kind, and intelligent, and was grateful to him for taking such pains to gratify and amuse my father. That was all. As to his thinking of me, in any way but the merest civility, I never suspected it for a moment. Otherwise, I should have kept out of his way, and thereby saved myself many a conscience-smite—the innocent pangs that any girl must feel when she has unwittingly made a man miserable. One day, meeting me in the soft August twilight, as I was walking home from the Hall, having staid later than my wont—for she was not well, my dear old lady; I was very sad about her—he joined me, and told me he was summoned away that night, probably to go abroad, on some work he had long been seeking, and would I "remember" him until he came back? I was so little aware of his meaning that I only laughed and said, "Yes, that I will, and recommend you too, as the very best architect I know." And this unhappy speech



MR. DONELLY'S WOOING.

brought about what, he said, he had not otherwise meant to tell me until he had a home to offer "worthy of me"—that he wished me to share it.

I suppose men mostly say the same things: thank God, I never had but one man's wooing, and that was sad enough to hear; because, of course, as I did not love him, I could only tell him so; and refuse him point-blank, which now I fear was done ungently and with some disdainful words, for I was taken by surprise. Marriage was not much in my plan of life at all; my own home experience did not incline me in its favor; while at the Hall, Bridget inveighed perpetually against the whole race of men; and her mistress kept on the subject a total silence. If I ever did think of being married, it was to some imaginary personage like the *preux chevaliers* of old. Though, I was forced to confess, no medieval knight could have behaved himself more knightly, with more true courtesy, consideration, and respect, than did this builder of houses, this overseer of bricklayers and carpenters, who perhaps had been one of them himself not so many years ago. Ay, even when I said my last decisive word,

looking firmly in his face, for I wished him to make no possible mistake. He was excessively pale, but he pleaded no more, and took his pain with such manly courage that I felt almost sorry for him, and in some roundabout way begged his pardon.

"You need not," he answered, holding our wicket gate open for me to pass in. "A woman's love is quite free, but so is a man's. You are not to blame for having refused me, any more than I am for having asked you. I shall never ask you again, but I shall love you to the day of my death."

So we parted; and I saw and heard no more of him. I never told any body what had happened; it was only my own affair, and it was better forgotten. Nor, after the first week or so, did I think much about it, except that when I was tired or sorrowful, or the troubles of life came upon me, as they did just then, thick and fast—though, as they only concerned my father and me, and not this history, I need not specify them—Mr. Donelly's voice used to come back to me, almost like a voice in a dream, saying his farewell words, "I shall love you to the day of my death." And sometimes, looking in her

calm aged face, far, far beyond all youth's passions and turmoils and cares, I wondered whether any body—that Irish husband, for instance, who, Bridget hinted, had made her so miserable—had ever said the same words, with the same determination and sincerity of tone, to Lady de Bougainville.

Those years, which changed me from a girl into a woman, made in her the change natural at her time of life. She had none of Mrs. Thrale's "three warnings;" her "messages from home" came still, but softly, tenderly, as such messages should come to one whose life was so valuable to every body about her, so inexpressibly precious, as she saw, to me. Also, my love seemed to develop in her another quality, which Bridget said had not been shown since she was a girl—wife and mother, but girl still—in Merrion Square; that charming *gaieté de cœur*, essentially French, which made her conversation and her company like that of a woman of thirty rather than seventy. And when I was with her I often forgot entirely how old she was, and reckoned on her future and my own as if they had been one and the same.

For we were now permanently settled, my father being no longer curate, but rector of Brierley. One of Lady de Bougainville's old acquaintances, belonging to the Turberville family, an Honorable somebody, who wrote her sometimes the most cordial and even affectionate letters, happened to be in the Ministry, and the living was a Crown living; so we always suspected her of having some hand in its disposal. But she never owned this, nor any other kind act that it was possible to do in secret.

This change made mine, as well as my father's, the busiest life possible. Nay, in our large and growing parish, with my youth and his delicate health, we might both have broken down under our work, save for our neighbor at the Hall. Oh, the blessing of riches, guided by a heart as warm as youth, and a judgment wide and clear with the wisdom and experience of age!

"And are you not happy in all this?" I once said to her. "Is it not well to have lived on to such a blessed and blessing old age?"

She answered, "Yes."

She was a little less active now than she used to be; had to give up one by one, sometimes with a slight touch of restlessness and regret, some of her own peculiar pleasures, such as the walk before breakfast, and the habit of doing every thing for herself, not asking, nay, often disliking, either help or the appearance of help, from those about her. But she let me help her now a little. And sometimes, when I fetched her her bonnet or fastened her shawl, she would say to me, smiling, "My dear, I think I am something like the Apostle Peter: when I was young, I girded myself and walked whither I would; now I am old, another girds me and leads me whither I would not. No, nobody could do that;" and, half laughing, she drew

herself up erect. "I am afraid I shall have a pretty strong will to the last."

Now and then people said to me—those who saw her at church, and the poor folk who came about the Hall—that "my lady" was looking much older. But I could not, and I would not see it. Whatever change came, was so gradual, so beautiful, like the fading of that Virginian creeper which we admired every autumn upon the walls of her house, that it seemed only change, not decay. And every feebleness of hers was as dear to me as the helplessness of a child is to its young mother, who, the more she has to do for it, loves it the better.

Oh, why is it not always thus? Why can not we all so live? I think we could if we tried—that we may be as much missed at eighty as at eighteen.

Though her bodily activity was circumscribed, Lady de Bougainville's mental energy was as keen as ever. She and my father laid their heads together over all the remediable evils in the parish, and some which had hitherto been thought irremediable: one I must name, for it brought about another event, which I had good need to remember.

One day my father came to the Hall in perfect despair upon an old grievance of his, the want of house accommodation for his poor.

"What chance have I?" said he, half in anger, half in grief. "How can I take care of my people's souls when nobody looks after their bodies? What use is it to preach to them in the pulpit and leave tracts at their doors, and expect them to be clean and tidy, honest and virtuous, when they are packed together like herrings in a barrel, in dwellings ill-drained, ill-ventilated, with the damp running in streams down the walls, and the rain dropping through the holes in the roof? For the old houses go unrepaired, and the new-built ones, few as they are, are almost worse than the old. I declare to you I would not put an old horse or even a dog of mine into some I have seen to-day."

"Will nobody build?" asked quietly Lady de Bougainville.

"I have put that question to every land-owner in the place, and they all say 'No; it would increase the poor-rates. Besides, cottage property is sunk capital; it never pays.' Yet they go on living in their 'elegant mansions' and their 'commodious villa residences.' Oh you rich! you rich! how you do grind the faces of the poor!"

"Hush, father," I whispered, for in his excitement he had quite forgotten himself. But Lady de Bougainville only smiled.

"You are right, Mr. Weston; that is, right in the main, though there may be something to be said on the opposite side—there usually is. But I thank you for speaking so plainly; tell me a little more."

"There is nothing to be told. It is a hopeless matter. Oh that I had an acre of ground, or a thousand pounds in my pocket, that I might build, if only three cottages, where decent

working-men might live and work! For charity begins in small things, and, to my thinking, it generally begins at home."

Again she said, "You are right," and sat for some minutes thinking; then called me. "Winny, how much was that money you put into the bank for me yesterday?—I forget: I am afraid I often do forget things now."

I told her the sum, a good large one, which had given her much pleasure at the time, for it was a debt unexpectedly repaid. I had entreated her to spend it on building a new conservatory, for the old one was too far from the house in wintry weather, and she was so fond of her flowers. But she had pertinaciously refused. "What, build at my age, and for my own pleasure? Let us think of something else to do. Opportunity will soon come." And it did.

"Mr. Weston, I thank you for putting this into my mind—for showing me what I ought to do. I wonder I never thought of it before. But," and she sighed, "I have been thinking too much and doing too little this many a year. Well, one lives and learns—lives and learns. If you like, you shall have that two-acre field behind my stable-yard, and Winny will pay you that money; she knows all about it; so that you may build your cottages at once."

I knew better than my father how costly the gift was, to her who was so tenacious of her privacy, who liked to hide behind her park and trees, keeping the whole world at bay: but having once decided, the thing was over and done. She entered into the scheme with all the energy of her nature; and wished to set about it immediately, "for," she said, "at my age I have no time to lose." Lengthy was the discussion between her and my delighted father how best to carry out their plans, doing most good and avoiding most evil.

"For the greatest evil in this sort of scheme," she said, "is making it a matter of charity. Remember, Mr. Weston, my tenants must pay me their rent. I shall exact it punctually, or I shall turn them out. I am, or I have sometimes been called, a hard woman: that is, I help only those who help themselves, or those whom Providence forbids to help themselves. The intermediate class, who can help themselves and will not, the idle spendthrift, the willing borrower, the debtor who is as bad as a thief, against these I set my face as a flint. For them expect of me no mercy; I have none."

As she spoke the fierce flash, so seldom seen now, came again into her eyes. She was much agitated; more so than the matter in question required, and my father regarded her in some surprise. Then he seemed all at once to remember, and said, gently, "No, you will not be tried. There is justice in what you say. 'He that will not work neither shall he eat,' for he would only take the bread out of the mouths of those that do work. It is God alone who is so perfect that He can send His sun to shine upon both the evil and the good."

Lady de Bougainville was silent; but a slight blush, so pretty in an old lady, grew upon her cheek, and she looked at my father with that tenderness with which she often regarded him, even when doctrinally she differed from him most.

They went on planning, and I reading; though my mind often wandered away, as young folks' will. I do not know if the mention of building houses carried it away in any particular direction, but I was considerably startled when I heard from my father's lips a certain name which had been unuttered among us for more than two years.

"Winny, have you any idea what has become of that young man—Donnell, wasn't his name? no, Donelly—who built Mr. Jones's house?"

"No," I said, feeling hot all over, and thankful it was twilight.

"Because, Lady de Bougainville, he would be the very man to design your cottages. He was full of the subject. Sprung from the people, he knew all about them. And he was so clever, so honest, so conscientious. Winny, do try to think how we could get at him."

"He went abroad," I said.

"But he may be back by this time, and Jones might know his address. In any case I should like to hear of him again—such a fine young fellow. And a rising, not a risen man, which you know you would like best, Lady de Bougainville."

Here was a predicament! To explain the whole truth, and hinder a young man's obtaining employment because he had once dared to make love to me; the thing was ridiculous! And yet to have him coming here, to meet him again, as I must, for I was Lady de Bougainville's right hand in every thing; what should I do? While I sat considering, whether for half a minute or half an hour I knew not, being so painfully confused, the decision was taken out of my hands. Lady de Bougainville, in her quick mode of settling things—she never "let grass grow under her feet"—rang the bell.

"Take my card across to Mr. Jones and say I should be much obliged if he would write on it the address of his architect, Mr. Donelly."

Well! it was she who did it, she and Fate; I had no hand in the matter, and whether I was glad or sorry for it I did not quite know.

Nor did I when, two days after, Lady de Bougainville told me she had had a letter from him.

"A capital, sensible, practical letter; you can read it, my dear. And he loses no time too, which I like. He says he will be down here in an hour from now. I suppose I must see him myself—and yet—"

She was visibly nervous—had been so all the morning, Bridget said; and no wonder. "My lady has not had a stranger in the house for twenty—no, it's five-and-twenty years."

A stranger and an Irishman; which latter fact seemed to recur to Lady de Bougainville, and haunt her uncomfortably till the minute

Mr. Donelly was announced. Then, repeating to herself, "This is unjust—unjust," she rose from her chair, and taking my arm ("You will come too," she had said; "I dislike strangers"), she crossed with feeble steps than usual the hall, and ascended the beautiful staircase to the tapestry chamber. There, looking grayer and more shadowy than ever in the dimness of the rainy morning, the painted knights and ladies reined in their faded steeds, and the spectral Columbus pointed out forever, to an equally ghostly Queen Isabella, his discovery of the New World.

Standing beneath it—investigating it apparently with the keenness of a young man to whom the whole world was new, with every thing in it to win—stood Edward Donelly.

He was a good deal altered—older, graver, browner; but it was the same face—pleasant, honest, kind. I did not like to look at it much, but merely bowed—as he did likewise, without offering to shake hands with me—and then I crept away into the farthest window-seat I could find.

Thence I watched him and Lady de Bougainville as they stood talking together, for they fell into conversation almost immediately. At first it was about the tapestry, which he excessively admired, and she took him round to examine, piece by piece, before she entered into business talk at all. Then they sat down opposite to one another, and launched into the great cottage question at once.

She liked him, I could see, even though the Irish accent seemed now and then to make her wince, and bring a grave, sad, absent look to her dear face; until some word of his, wise and generous, honest and manly—and the subject in hand called out a good many of the like—made her turn back to him, inquisitively, but not unkindly, and listen once more. He had a good deal to say, and he said it well; earnestly too, as if his whole heart were in it. His energy and enthusiasm seemed not to displease her, but rather to arouse in her a certain sympathy, reminding her of something which had once been in herself, but was no longer.

They talked, I think, for nearly two hours; by that time the matter was quite settled; and he departed.

"Yes, I like him," she said, when he was gone; and he lingered not a minute after their business talk was ended. "Your father was right; I will trust Mr. Donelly, though he is an Irishman."

So he came, all that spring, whenever sent for, and oftener when necessary, to Brierley Hall. Never to Brierley Rectory. My father's cordially given invitations were as cordially but invariably declined. When he and I chanced to meet, his manner was distant, courteous, yet so self-possessed that I began to doubt whether he had not forgotten all about that painful little episode, and whether it was necessary for me to keep so carefully out of his way. He seemed to be absorbingly full of his work—per-

haps also he was married. Should I have been glad to hear he was married? I dare not tell. Nay, had she, who was my visible conscience, and before whom I often now felt a sad hypocrite—had Lady de Bougainville herself asked me the question, I could not have told.

But she asked me no questions at all; apparently never thought about me, being so engrossed in her cottages. They grew day by day under our eyes, as fast as a child or any other living thing, and she took as much pleasure in them. For they were, as she sometimes said, not dull dead bricks and mortar, but tangible blessings, and would be so to many after she was gone. To make them such, she entered, in concert with Mr. Donelly, into the driest details—saw that windows would open and doors shut—that walls were solid and roofs substantial—that the poor man should have, according to his needs, as many comforts as the rich.

"I don't expect to gain much by my investment," she said to her architect one day, "but I hope not to lose. For I mean, as you say, to do nothing for mere charity. The honest, steady, deserving, who pay me their rent regularly, shall be made as happy as I can make them; the drunken, idle, and reckless may go. Mercy to them is injustice to the rest."

"I know that," he answered. "And yet," turning to her as she stood, and looking right in her face with his honest eyes, "if things came to the worst, in you, of all others, I think would be found that charity which 'suffereth long, and is kind.'"

They often talked on this wise, on other than mere business topics; and I stood listening; quite apart, perhaps even a little jealous, yet not altogether miserable. One likes to feel that a man who has once cared for one is not, at any rate, a man to be ashamed of.

It was on this day, if I remember right—when they had talked until he had missed his train—that Lady de Bougainville first invited Mr. Donelly to lunch. What made her do it I can not guess, for it was twenty years and more since any guest, save myself, had taken a meal at her table. He accepted, though with hesitation; and we found ourselves sitting all three in the cedar parlor, and doing our best to talk unconstrainedly. She, most; though I saw by her face—the expression of which I knew so well—that every word was painful to her, and that she would have rescinded the invitation if she could.

Nevertheless, when lunch was announced, she, with a smile of half apology to me, took the arm of her guest, and proceeded to the dining-room.

I like to remember these little things, and how I followed those two as they walked slowly across the hall between the green scagliola pillars. A goodly pair they were—for she was, proportionately, almost as tall as he, and as upright. They might have been mother and son, or grandmother and grandson; had her

elder children lived, she would probably have had a grandson just his age. I wondered, did she think of this? Or, when she took the head of her long table—with him and me on either side, for the seat at the foot was never filled—did she recall the days when the empty board was full, the great silent room noisy with laughter? But whatever she felt, she showed nothing. I can see her this minute, sitting grave and sweet in her place—which it had pleased Heaven she should occupy so long—leaning over from one to the other of us two, so lately strangers, and talking—as she might have leaned and talked to us out of the other world, to which it often seemed as if she already half belonged.

Mr. Donelly had the most of her talk, of course; and it ranged over all subjects—except “shop”—which for the nonce she delicately ignored. Close as they were to her heart, she never once referred to her cottages. Her conversation with him was simply that of a lady with a gentleman, who, however differing from her in opinion—and he held amazingly fast to his own—was a gentleman, and should be treated as such. And he treated her—well, I doubt if any of the old De Bougainvilles could have shown more chivalric deference, more tender respect, than Mr. Donelly always paid to my dear old lady.

But they fought a good deal, these two candid people; and at last, in their lively battles, they got upon a topic which half frightened me. It was about Mr. Jones, the retired tradesman, from whom, of all the inhabitants of the obnoxious villa residences, Lady de Bougainville seemed most to shrink.

“Nor do I wonder at it,” said Mr. Donelly. “He is a rough, coarse, illiterate man, who tries to hide his deficiencies under great show of wealth. But he is an honest-meaning man for all that, and carefully gives to his children the advantages he misses in himself. The girls are well-educated; the boys will all be sent to college. A generation hence the Joneses may be a notable family; they will certainly be an accomplished and refined one.”

“Do you think so?”

“I think it because I feel it. You will see.”

“I shall not see,” said Lady de Bougainville, gently; “but I am glad to believe it. In my old age I believe many things which I doubted when I was young. And I will believe this,” with one of her slight bends of old-fashioned compliment, “just because Mr. Donelly says it.”

The pretty civility was lost upon him. Alas! he was too much in earnest.

“Do not mistake me, Lady de Bougainville. Do not suppose I undervalue birth or breeding. To be well-born and gently nurtured must be”—here he sighed—“one of the greatest blessings that can happen to a man. But it is only a chance blessing; and he to whose lot it does not fall must learn to do without it. I think he can. Perhaps—or, at least, I used to dream so when a boy—perhaps the next best thing to

being the descendant of an ancient and honorable family is to be the founder of one.”

“A better thing, it seems to me,” said Lady de Bougainville.

We had risen from table, and were standing in the doorway. He, as he spoke, had drawn himself up to every inch of his excellent height, throwing his shoulders back—a trick he had—and looking out half sadly, yet quite fearlessly, as if right into the unknown future, with those clear good eyes of his. She paused a minute, met them, and then for the first time (they had hitherto only bowed, French fashion) she extended to him her hand. It was taken—reverently, gratefully, almost tenderly; and they again passed on before me arm in arm down the long hall.

As they went I overheard—I hardly know how, for it was evidently not meant for me to hear, only I was so painfully alive to all their words—the following conversation.

She said to him—apologizing slightly for the curiosity which an old lady may show, not ungracefully, in a young man’s affairs—“You speak of founding a family: are you married?”

“No.”

“But, perhaps, you expect to be?”

“I do not.” He hesitated a little, then added: “Since the matter concerns no one but myself, I will be candid with you. I once asked a lady, and she refused me. I shall never ask again. My profession must be to me in the stead of a wife.”

“That is a pity. The lady has had a loss; you would have made a good husband.”

“Thank you.”

They said no more, and she respected his confidence; for in discussing him afterward with me, freely as was her habit, this was the only part of Mr. Donelly’s conversation which she omitted to speak of. But she spoke very kindly of him; and next time he came her manner was sweet and gracious as it had never been before; “Because,” she said, “young as he is, I respect him. He has taught me another of my lessons. Child, as I once told you, I think we have never done learning.”

Was I learning, too? I know not. I seemed to live week after week in a curious sort of dream—sometimes happy, sometimes unhappy—in which I was always expecting or dreading something, and not knowing one day what might happen the next.

At last something did happen, though I was ignorant of it at the time.

Mr. Donelly was again invited to lunch and spend the day—indeed, I had to write the note of invitation, Lady de Bougainville just signing it, as was her way with much of her correspondence now. For the first time he failed in an appointment, but next day sent her a letter, a rather long letter, which, instead of showing to me, she put in her pocket, saying she would tell me about it another time. That time never arrived, though I remained with her till evening.

All day she was *distrait* and anxious-looking, falling into her old moods of absence and silence. Nay, the slight "peculiarities"—little restlessnesses, obstinacies, and irritabilities—which she had had when first I knew her, and which had since been smothered down into the exceeding serenity of her lovely old age, revived again. That new, vivid interest of her life, her pet cottages, seemed almost forgotten, and she kept dwelling continually upon things long gone by.

It was that day she told me, for the first time, the story of her seven years' secret, and how much the keeping of it had cost her.

"Not that I regret any thing, my dear, or doubt that I was right in keeping it. But even a righteous secret is a heavy burden, and I am sorry for all who have to bear it."

She looked at me and looked away, then referred to herself again, and began speaking of her early poverty, and of other portions of her life at Ditchley, after a fashion that she had never done before, half accounting for this by saying that I was not a child now, and that she liked to talk of the past to me, if I did not mind.

"I had no youth myself, you know, I married so early. Early marriages are not always safe things; nay, as Bridget would tell you—a thorough misogynist is poor Bridget!—all marriages are a great risk. My wonder is, not that they are sometimes unhappy, but that they are ever happy at all. I should counsel no young girl to change her state unless she thoroughly knows, and deeply loves, the man she marries; and"—patting my cheek—"I should be so sorry to see any trouble come to my little Winifred, that I am glad she cares for no man, and will not marry just yet, perhaps never at all."

"Never at all!" I cried, with the utmost sincerity, believing I could love no man alive as I loved her who bent over me. Her dear old face grew peaceful again and tender, with the tenderness that only strong natures know. She smiled, and went on talking in a desultory way; chiefly about herself, betraying rather than confessing how bright her girlish dreams had been, and how they had melted away like morning clouds; and she had to take up the fragments of her broken life, and carry it on through rain and storm, heat and frost, till she came, a lonely old woman, to the evening gray.

"No, not gray," I said, "but a rosy sunset, like that one"—and I pointed westward, whence, through all the six windows of the tapestry chamber, streamed a flood of yellow light, in which the dim figures looked almost alive. "You are like Columbus, sailing toward the sunset, and seeing it before you—oh, so bright!"

"Yes, and when he had sailed far, far west—do you remember?—and he and his crew were almost exhausted, they perceived, a long way off, across the sea, the scent of the yet invisible spice-grounds. And they took courage, for they knew they were not far from land."

She spoke half to herself, with that wistful look, not of this world at all, in her eyes. Frightened, I clung to her, and begged her "not to talk like that, for I almost saw her wings growing." And for days after then, in the anxiety of watching her—for something had vexed her, Bridget said, and brought on one of her brief attacks of illness—I forgot all about Mr. Donelly and the letter.

Nor for some weeks did any thing revive the subject. He came but little to the Hall, and never when I was there; though, as I discovered accidentally, he and Lady de Bougainville met frequently at the now nearly-finished cottages, and were the best friends in the world. "I never thought my lady would have taken so to any young man," commented Bridget, "and he an Irishman too. Well, wonders will never cease!" But as my dear old lady never said a word to me about him, of course I held my tongue.

Gradually a queer sort of jealousy came over me. Jealousy of whom, or why? I could not clearly tell—only it made me thoroughly miserable. Something, or some one, seemed to have come between me and her, whom I had been used to engross entirely, and I could not bear it. I never complained, being too proud for that; but all the brightness seemed taken out of my life. I moped about; even my father noticed how ill I was looking; and then I tried an unnatural cheerfulness. For I felt not only ill but wicked, hating every body about me, and most of all myself. And I suffered—oh, how we do suffer when we are young!

Did Lady de Bougainville notice it? or did she, in her calm old age, think nothing of it, concluding my troubles would soon pass away? Hers were all over now. At times I fancied so, and almost envied her, and those whose life is completed, whose story is told—for whom no more sorrow is possible any more.

"No," she said, one day, when I had crept to her foot-stool and laid her hand on my hot head, "it is quite true; nothing does grieve me now—not very much. In old age one sees farther and clearer than younger people do. It is like living on a hill-top, from whence the ups and downs of life appear in their just proportions, and every way one looks one beholds, as it were, 'the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.'"

A good deal more she said to the same effect, which made me weep a little, but not so as to trouble her. And we sat a long time together, feeling nearer than we had done for some time, when our talk was broken in upon by a sudden visitor—Mr. Donelly.

Evidently Lady de Bougainville had not expected him, for she started almost as much as he did at the sight of her and me together; and both—nay, we all three—looked extremely uncomfortable.

He apologized hurriedly for his intrusion, saying it was inevitable. "I have got that work abroad I told you of, and ought to be off

to India in four days, if you will allow me to transfer to a friend the completion of your cottages. They are nearly done now. It is a serious matter this engagement; it would last ten years. Will you set me free to accept it?"

"Certainly," she replied. "Come with me into the cedar parlor, and explain all."

The explanation took very long, or it seemed so. I scarcely stirred from my seat, I remember, but stupidly watched the light fade, and the merry spring-birds drop into silence—until Lady de Bougainville came back and told me he was gone; and I recognized that, in all human probability, I should never see him again in this world. Never! since he had only left a formal message of farewell to my father and to me. Lady de Bougainville delivered it, and then sat down, silent and sorry.

"Yes, I am sorry he is gone," she owned. "I like him. Latterly, I have taken great pains to make friends with him, so as to know him well, and I like him. He has the true, warm Irish heart, and a conscience besides; the winning Irish pleasantness, and sincerity underneath it. I tested him, and he has not disappointed me. Nay, he has taught me a lesson which, old as I am, I had need to learn."

What it was I did not ask; it was, indeed, impossible to speak, for I began crying. She drew my head against her shoulder. "Poor little girl!"—then breathed, rather than whispered, in my ear, "You need tell me nothing. He told me all!"

"Did he? How dared he?" I cried, in hot indignation; for I was not myself, and knew not how I felt or what I was doing. "He has told you, and you think—"

"I think my little girl did exactly what was right, and so does he. How could he expect my Winifred to drop into a man's mouth all in a minute, like a ripe peach from a wall? He was a very foolish fellow, and I told him so."

I was silent.

"But I also think," she continued, gently, "that he is a very good fellow, generous and faithful, honest and true. I have found out all about him, from his birth upward, and found out nothing ill. If you really knew him, possibly you might love him: I don't say you would, but you might; for he is a man you could trust—which is the beginning and end of all real love."

She sighed, and tried to look into my face, but I hid it carefully.

"What is your objection against him? His being a working-man's son?"

"No, that would not matter," said I, with an earnestness that surprised myself. But I had grown wiser since I had left my teens behind.

"You are right, Winny: his birth could not matter, and ought not, of itself; for he is thoroughly well educated and refined. Though, I own, having not quite got over my class-prejudices, it might matter if he had a tribe of unpleasant relations belonging to him. But he

has none. He is quite alone in the world—too much alone for such a warm heart. And he has set it irretrievably upon a certain little girl I know. I will not urge you, Winifred: love must come freely, or it is worthless; and if you do not love him, let him go. He will bear it somehow; busy men seldom break their hearts. Only, if he does not marry you, I think he will never marry any body."

She ceased. The gentle, slow speech—the soft, cold touch of the little hand, what a contrast to the whirl that was going on in my poor heart and head, making me feel as if the room were turning round and round!

"Do I wound or vex you, my dear, by speaking of this? Forgive me: it was only because you have no mother to speak to; a mother, when she can be trusted, is the best friend always. I remember, my own daughter"—she stopped suddenly: a sort of convulsion passed over her face, as if, even now, the remembrance was too bitter to bear. "I had rather not tell you of that. My daughter is long since with God."

Yet no mother could be more tender, more sympathizing than she was with me, another woman's child, with not the slightest claim upon her—of blood, at least; as, putting aside entirely her own past, she tried to help me to unravel my passionate, troubled present. For even then I hardly knew my own heart—was cruelly uncertain as to what I had best do, or what I wished to do, except to do right. One thing only I was clear about—my intense anxiety never to be parted from her.

"But you must be parted some time," said she, softly; "and before I go, it would be a comfort to me to give my little girl into safe-keeping—to some one who will take care of her, without tyrannizing over her; who is a gentle and good man, without being a weak man. Child! if you knew what it is to have the mere sham of a husband—the mockery of a protector, against whom one has to protect one's self, and more than one's self; above all, the misery of bearing and bringing up children, in whom one's utmost terror is to see any likeness to their father! Yet"—here she broke off in an altogether changed tone—"yet, my dear, many women have borne this. I have seen several instances of it in my long life, and I should like to be quite certain before I die that no such lot will befall my little Winifred—as it never will if she marries Edward Donelly."

And then she said a good deal more for him (I find myself always writing "him" and "her," as if they were the only two people in the world). All her words were true, and I knew it.

"Suppose," she whispered, at last, in the playful manner which sat so prettily upon her, "that, instead of an old woman making love to you by proxy in this fashion, the young man were to come back and do it himself?"

"He can not," I said, half amused and yet dolefully; "it is quite too late. He has gone away forever."

"Not—not exactly," and her smile broadened into actual mischievousness. "I told him to take a good hour's walk across country, and come here again after I had sent you away, you obnoxious little person, whom he has been so afraid of offending that I have seen not half enough of him, to have a quiet cup of tea and a farewell chat with an old lady whom I think he is rather fond of, and who is never likely to see him again in this world. Hark!"—

For we heard a step on the gravel below—a step which could be only a man's, and a young man's—firm and strong like himself, and yet a little uncertain too. I don't know how or why, but every footfall went into my heart.

"Shall I tell him to go away? or shall I send him in here? Choose. Just one word, my little Winny! Yes, or No?"

I did not say either, but I clung to her, sobbing. She kissed and blessed me, not very far from sobbing herself, and went away.

That evening two young people instead of one took tea with Lady de Bougainville; but I can not be expected to remember much that passed at that memorable meal. I am afraid the conversation was very desultory, and not in the least improving. I can only recall the image of her who sat there at the head of her dining-table, for she made it a composite repast—a "hungry" tea—out of compliment to a gentleman who could not be supposed to live entirely upon love. She sat in her pretty old lady's dress—black silk and pure white cambric, and with her sweet old lady's face beaming down upon us, with the happy look that people wear who have helped to create happiness long after their own has slipped away.

My Ned—we agreed between us that I should call him Ned instead of Edward, which name seemed to grate upon ears that we would not have wounded for the world—my Ned was, as Lady de Bougainville well knew, the most acceptable son-in-law my father could have found; especially as, not to part me from the two dear ones who said they could not possibly do without me, we agreed, for the first year or two, to come and live at the Rectory. Not without a struggle, I think, on Ned's part, and the uncomfortable feeling of a man who comes and hangs up his hat in his wife's father's house; but still my father was such an exceptional person, that it was not really a humiliation or vexation; and Edward Donelly was too honest a man to care for the mere appearance of things. He says, if he ever adopts a crest or a motto, it shall be this: "Never mind the outside."

Of course he did not go to India. Putting aside all other considerations, there happened to be a little girl at hand who would rather have been a poor man's wife all her days than allowed him to risk health, life, and every thing that makes life dear and valuable, in the struggle after fortune that he would have had out there. He declined the appointment, and has never regretted doing so.

Our courtship days were not long; and we

spent a good many of them at Brierley Hall, often close beside its dear mistress. She said she did not mind our love-making; indeed, rather enjoyed it, as all the time she had two people making love to herself! For indeed Ned did it, in his chivalric way, quite as much as I.

He used to come to Brierley every Saturday and stay till Monday, the only time he could spare from his active, busy life. Oh those heavenly Sundays! a peaceful, church-going morning, a long afternoon strolling about under the cool green shadow of the trees, or sitting in the summer-house by the lake; whence we used to catch peeps of the house he had built, which he declared was the best bit of architecture he ever planned in his life! Above all, those still twilights in the tapestry room; for we never left her alone of evenings, but sat with her and listened to her talk—charming as ever, fresh and youthful and bright. She was more clever and amusing by far than I, and Ned once actually acknowledged this.

Soon—sooner than I liked; but she insisted upon it, saying she wished to see it with her own eyes—came our quiet, simple wedding, at which the only festivities were a dinner to my poor people and a tea-party to my school-children in the grounds of the Hall. My father married us; and, seeing that it is not defined in the Prayer-book whether a man or a woman should give the bride away, Lady de Bougainville undertook that office herself. I see her now, in her long, sweeping dress of gray silk—worn for the first and only time—her black velvet cloak, and close white crape bonnet, under which the faded face looked beautiful still. And I feel the touch of the soft, aged hand that put mine into the young and strong one, which will hold it safe through life. Afterward, as my husband and I walked down the church together, I noticed—and wondered if she did too—the sun shining on the white tablet over the Brierley Hall pew, where, after the long list of names, came the brief line, "They all rest here!"

All—all! Every one of her own flesh and blood, upon whom she had built her hope and joy. Yet she had lived on, and God had given her rest too—rest and peace, even in this world. Ay, and blessedness, poor childless mother, in blessing other people's children.

It was her earnest wish that she might live to hold on her knees a child of mine, but we were a year and a half without one; and that year and a half drew thinner and thinner the slender thread of life which Time was now winding up so fast. She was past eighty—how much we could not tell, nor could she, for she said she had long lost count of her birthdays; and that we should have to guess at her age when it required to be noted down—she did not say where, having quite given up the habit she once had of constantly referring to her own decease. And life, even yet, was not only tolerable, but even pleasant to her: her few bodily infirmities

she bore so sweetly, and her mind was so exceedingly youthful still. Only at times, when recurring with a memory wonderfully vivid to events and persons of her youth, now become historical, she would suddenly recognize how long she had lived, and how she stood, a solitary landmark of gone-by years, in the midst of this busy, bustling world.

"I scarcely belong to this age," she would say. "It is almost time we were away, I and Bridget, before we give any body trouble."

And poor Bridget, who had far more of the weaknesses of age—mental and bodily—than her mistress, was often tended and soothed by her in a half pathetic, half humorous way, and laughed at, not unkindly, as a "dear, grumbling old woman," which made Bridget laugh too, and, recovering all her Irish good-humor, strive to bear more patiently the inevitable burden of old age, saying, as she watched the beloved figure moving about—graceful even yet, though active no longer—"Sure enough, my lady isn't young herself, and has a deal to put up with without being bothered by me. But she always did take care of every body except herself."

And when the time came that I was rather helpless too, Lady de Bougainville turned the tables, and insisted upon taking care of me. She arranged my whole paraphernalia of little clothes, cutting out most of them with her own clever hands, which had once fabricated so many. And her latest skill and latest eyesight were expended upon a wonderfully-embroidered christening-robe for little "Josephine," as we were determined to call her from the very first, resolutely ignoring the possibility of her being "Joseph." We used to sit and talk of her for hours, until she grew to us an actual existence.

"I never was a godmother in my life," Lady de Bougainville said one day, when we sat together with our basket of work between us. "I mean to be quite proud of my god-daughter and name-child. But I shall not leave her a fortune, you know that—neither her nor her mother; I shall only leave you enough always to keep the wolf from the door," and she smiled. "The rest your husband must earn; he can, and he will. It does a man good, too—makes twice a man of him—to feel he is working for wife and child, and that upon him rests the future of both. Mr. Donelly said so to me only yesterday."

"Did he?" cried I, with my heart in my eyes—the heart so hard to win; but Ned had it wholly now. "I don't very much care for his making a great fortune, but I know he will earn a great name some of these days. And he is so good, so good! Oh, it's a grand thing to be every day more and more proud of one's husband!"

I had forgotten to whom I was speaking—forgotten the painted face over the fire-place behind me—the poor, weak, handsome face, with its self-satisfied smirk, which, wherever

she sat, she never looked at, though sometimes it haunted me dreadfully still.

"Yes," she answered, in a grave, calm tone, neither glancing at it—though it was just opposite to her—nor away from it. "Yes; it is a good thing to be proud—as you are justly proud—of your husband."

I was silent; but I recognized—I, a wife, and nearly a mother—as I had never done before, how terrible must have been the burden—the heaviest that can be laid upon any woman—which this woman had had to take up and bear all her life. Ay, and had borne, unshrinkingly, to the end.

It was this day, I remember—for I seem now to remember vividly every day of these last weeks—that a strange thing happened, which I am glad now did happen, and in time for me to know of it, because it proved that, though she was, as she said, "a hard woman"—and all the honest tenants of her cottages and the faithful servants in her house blessed her hardness, for they declared it saved them from being victims to the drunken, the idle, and the dissolute—still, Lady de Bougainville was not pitiless, even to those she most abhorred.

The afternoon post brought her a letter, the sight of which made her start and turn it over and over again incredulously. I, in passing it on to her, had just noticed that it was a hand unknown to me—a large, remarkable hand, though careless and enfeebled-looking, like an old man's writing. As she opened it an expression came across her face that, in all the years I had known her now, I had never seen before. Anger, defiance, contempt, repugnance, all were there. With hands violently trembling, she put on her spectacles and went to the window to read it alone. Then she came back and touched Bridget on the shoulder.

"He is alive yet; I thought he was dead long ago—did not you? But he is alive yet. All my own dead, and he only alive! He has written to me."

"Who, my lady?"

"Mr. Summerhayes."

Bridget's half-stupid old age seemed suddenly roused into fury. She snatched the letter from the table, dashed it down, and trampled upon it.

"Never heed him, my lady. Don't vex yourself; he isn't worth it. How dare he trouble you? What does he want?"

"What he always wanted—money," and a slight sneer moved her lips. "I have refused it to him, you know, more than once; but now he is dying, he writes, dying in a work-house. And he is old, just my age. Who would have thought that we two, he and I, should have lived so long? Well, he begs me, for the love of God, and for the sake of old times, *not* to let him die in a work-house. Must I, Bridget?"

But Bridget, frightened at her mistress's looks, made no answer.

"I should have done it, a few years ago; I know I should; but now—"

She hesitated; and then, turning to me, said more quietly, "I can not judge the thing myself. Winifred, you are a good woman; you may. This man has been the curse of my life. He helped to ruin my husband—he blasted the happiness of my daughter. He was a liar, a profligate, a swindler—every thing I most hated, and hate still! Why he has been left to cumber the earth these eighty years—a blessing to no human being, and a torment to whosoever had to do with him—God knows! I have thought sometimes, were I Providence, he should have died long ago, or better, never been born."

She spoke passionately—ay, in spite of her years and her feebleness—and her faded eyes glowed with all the indignation of youth; only hers was no personal anger, or desire of vengeance, but that righteous wrath against evil and the doers of it, which we believe to be one of the attributes of Divinity itself.

"What do you say, Winifred? Tell me—for I dare not judge the matter myself—shall I leave him where he is, to die the death of the wicked, or have pity upon him? Justice or mercy—which shall it be?"

I could not tell; I was utterly bewildered. Only one thing came into my mind to say, and I said it: "Was any body fond of him? Was she fond of him?"

Oh, the look of her—dead Adrienne's mother! I shall never forget it. Agony—bitterness—tender remembrance—the struggle to be just, but not unmerciful; in all these I could trace the faint reflection of what that terrible grief, buried so long, must once have been.

At length she said, calmly, "You are right; I see it now. Yes, I will own the truth; she was fond of him. And that decides the question."

It was decided in a very few minutes more, for she evidently could not brook much discussion of the matter. We arranged that my husband should take upon himself the whole trouble of discovering how far Mr. Summerhayes's letter was true—"He may not be telling the truth even yet," Lady de Bougainville said, bitterly—and then put him into some decent lodging where he might be taken care of till he died.

"Think, Winifred," she said, reading his letter over again before she gave it to me to give to my husband, "think what it must be to have reached the bridge and shrink in terror from crossing it; to have come to the end of life and be afraid of dying. That is his case. Poor soul! I ought, perhaps, even to be sorry for him; and I am."

She said no more, and I believe this was the last time—except in one or two brief business communications with Mr. Donelly—that she ever mentioned the name of Owen Summerhayes. He lived a pensioner on her charity for some weeks; then he died and was buried. That is all.

The rest of the afternoon, I remember, we

spent very peacefully. Her agitation seemed to have entirely passed away, leaving her more gentle, even more cheerful, than usual. She talked no more about the past, but wholly of the future—my future, and that of the little one that was coming to me. Many wise and good words she said—as from a mother to a mother—about the bringing up, for God's glory and its parents' blessing, of that best gift of Heaven, and best teacher under heaven, a little, white-souled, innocent child.

Then she insisted on walking with me to the park gates, her first walk for many days. It had been an inclement winter, and for weeks she had been unable to cross the threshold, even to go to church. But to-day was so mild and bright that she thought she would venture.

"Only don't tell Bridget; for I can walk back quite well alone, with the help of my capital stick," without which she never walked a step now. At first she had disliked using it very much; but now she called it "her good friend."

On it she leaned, gently declining my arm, saying I was the invalid, and she must rather take care of me; and so we walked together, slowly and contentedly, down the elm avenue. It was quite bare of leaves, but beautiful still; the fine tracery of the branches outlined sharp against the sky—that special loveliness of winter trees which summer never shows. She noticed it: noticed, too, with her quick eye for all these things, the first beginning of spring—a little February daisy peeping up through the grass. And then she stood and listened to a vociferous robin redbreast, opening his mouth and singing aloud, as winter robins always seem to do, from the elm-bough overhead.

"I like a robin," she said. "He is such a brave bird."

When we reached the park gates she turned a little paler, and leaned heavier on her stick. I was afraid she was very tired, and said so.

"My dear, I am always tired now." Then, patting my hand with a bright smile—nay, more than bright, actually radiant—she added, "Never mind; I shall be all right soon."

I watched her, after we had parted—just as we always parted—with a tender kiss, and a warning to "take great care of myself;" watched her, I knew not why, except that I so loved to do it, until she was out of sight, and then went satisfied home; ignorant—oh, how ignorant!—that it was my last sight of her, consciously, in this world.

That night my trouble came upon me unawares. We had a sore struggle for our lives, my baby and I. I remember nothing about her birth—poor little lamb!—nor for weeks after it. My head went wrong; and I had rather not think any more than I can help, even now, of that dreadful time.

During my delirium, among all the horrible figures that filled my room, I recall one—not horrible, but sweet—which came and stood at



DOWN THE ELM AVENUE.

my bedside, looking at me with the saddest, tenderest eyes. I took it, they tell me, for the Virgin Mary, of whom I had just read some Catholic legend that the Mother of Christ comes herself to fetch the souls of all women who die in childbirth. I thought she had come for mine. Only she was not the young Madonna, fair and calm; she was Mary grown old, injured to many sorrows, heart-pierced with many swords, yet living still; Mary, mother of the Lord, human and full of frailty, yet, like her Son, "made perfect through suffering," as, please God! we all may be made. And when the vision departed, they tell me, I missed it, and mourned for it, and raved for days about "my Virgin Mary;" but she never came again.

When I woke up from my illness I was not at home, but in a quiet lodging by the sea, with kind though strange faces about me, and my husband constantly at my side. He had never left me, indeed, but I did not know him; I hardly did, even in my right mind. He had grown so much older, and some of his pretty curly locks—little Josephine's are just like them—had turned quite gray.

It was he who told me, cautiously and by slow degrees, how ill I had been, and how I had still, by the mercy of God, a little Josephine—a healthy, living daughter—waiting for me at home at Brierley.

"But who has taken charge of her all this while?" I asked. And gradually, as the interests and needs of life came back upon me again, I became excessively anxious and unhappy, until a new thought struck me: "Oh,

her godmother; she would send for baby and take care of her. Then she would be quite safe, I know."

My husband was silent.

"Has her godmother seen her?"

"Once."

"Only once!"—a little disappointed, till I remembered how feeble Lady de Bougainville was. "She has not got my little lamb with her, then. But she has seen her. When will she see her again—when?"

"Some day," Edward said, gently, tightening his hold of my hand. "Some day, my wife. But her godmother does not want her now. She has her own children again."

And so I learned, as tenderly as my husband could break it to me, that Lady de Bougainville had, according to the word she used of her own dear ones, "gone away;" and that when I went home to my little Josephine I should find her place vacant; that on this side the grave I should see the face I loved no more.

It seemed that my vision of the Virgin Mary was reality; that, hearing of my extreme danger, Lady de Bougainville had risen from her bed in the middle of the night—a wild, stormy winter's night—and come to me; had sat by me, tended me, and with her indomitable hope and courage kept from sinking into utter despair my poor husband and my father, until the trial was over, and mine and baby's life were safe. Then she went home, troubling no one, complaining to no one, and lay down on her bed, to rise up no more.

She was ill a few days—only a few; and

every one thought she would be better very soon, until she was actually dying. It was just about midnight, and all her faithful and attached servants hastily gathered round her, but too late. She knew no one, and said not a single word to any one, but just lay, sleeping into death, as it were, as quiet as an hour-old child. Only once, a few minutes before her departure, catching suddenly at the hand which held hers, and opening her eyes wide, she fixed them steadily upon the empty space at the foot of her bed.

"Look, Bridget!" she said, in a joyful voice. "Look! the children—the children!"

It might have been—God knows!

* * * * *

It was spring—full, bright, cheerful May—when, carrying our little daughter in his arms, my husband took me for the first time to see the new grave which had risen up beside the

others in Brierley church-yard. I sat down by it; put its pretty primroses, already so numerous, into my baby's hands, and talked to her unheeding ears about her godmother.

But all the while I had no feeling whatever, and I never have had since, that it was really *herself* who lay sleeping there: she who to the last day of her long term of years was such a brave lady; so full of energy, activity, courage, and strength—whose whole thoughts were not for herself but for others—who was forever busy doing good. She was doing the same somewhere else, I was certain; carrying out the same heroic life, loving with the same warm heart, rejoicing with a keener and more perfect joy.

And so I think of her still; and I *will* think of her, and I will not grieve. But I know that on earth I shall never again behold the like of my dear Lady de Bougainville.

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